Once a week do this

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WHENEVER you wash your hair—and most people do it once a week—douse full strength Listerine on the scalp either before or after the rinse. Then massage the scalp and hair vigorously for several minutes.

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Moreover, it is unquestionably one of the best treatments for dandruff—to prevent it, and to overcome it once it has started.

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Listerine checks dandruff because it attacks infection that causes it, removes and dissolves the particles of loose dandruff and heals and soothes the scalp. Lambert Pharmacal Company, St. Louis, Mo., U. S. A.

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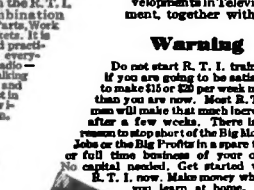

THE R. T. I. ADVISORY BOARD. These men are executives with important posts in the radio industry—manufacturing, sales, service, broadcasting, engineering, etc., etc. They supervise R. T. I. Work Sheets, Job Tickets, and other training methods.

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VOL. II, No. 1

CONTENTS

APRIL, 1930

COVER DESIGN — H. W. WESSOLOWSKI
Painted in Water-colors from a Scene in "Monsters of Moyen."

THE MAN WHO WAS DEAD — THOMAS H. KNIGHT — 9
As Jerry's Eyes Fell on the Creature's Head, He Shuddered—for the Face Was Nothing but Bone, with Dull-brown Skin Stretched Taut over It. A Skeleton That Was Alive!

MONSTERS OF MOYEN — ARTHUR J. BURKS — 18
"The Western World Shall be Next!" Was the Dread Ultimatum of the Half-monster, Half-god Moyen.

VAMPIRES OF VENUS — ANTHONY PELCHER — 47
Leslie Lorner, an Entomologist Borrowed from the Earth, Pits Himself Against the Night-flying Vampires That Are Ravaging the Inhabitants of Venus.

BRIGANDS OF THE MOON — RAY CUMMINGS — 60
Out of Awful Space Tumbled the Space-ship Planetara Towards the Moon, Her Officers Dead, With Bandits at Her Helm—and the Controls Out of Order!

THE SOUL-SNATCHER — TOM CURRY — 101
From Twenty Miles Away Stabbed the "Atom-filtering" Rays to Allen Baker in His Cell in the Death House.

THE RAY OF MADNESS — CAPTAIN S. P. MEEK — 114
Dr. Bird Uncovers a Dastardly Plot, Amazing in its Mechanical Ingenuity, Behind the Apparently Trivial Eye Trouble of the President.

THE READERS' CORNER — ALL OF US — 127
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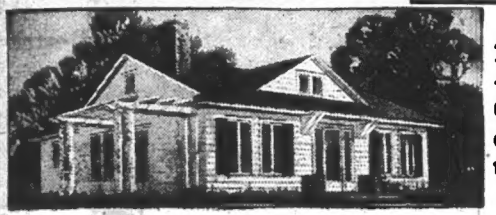

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FREE! In appreciation of your suggesting a name for this house real quickly, we will send you FREE and POSTPAID, (the floor plans and blue print of this beautiful house. Understand, this does not obligate you in any way. Fill out and mail the coupon TODAY—QUICK! ANY NAME MAY WIN.

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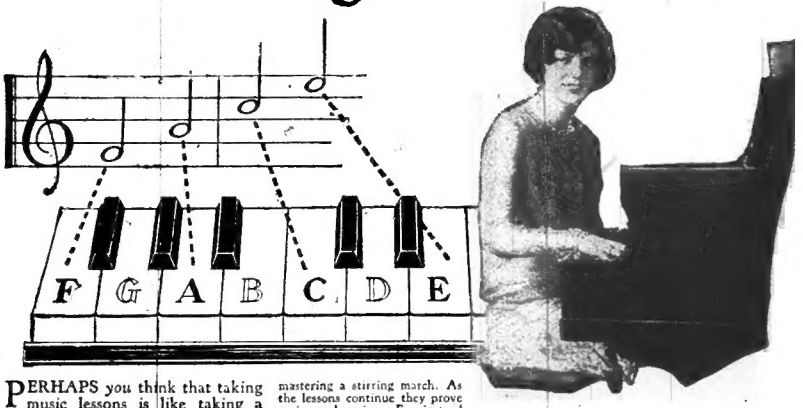
To those who think Learning Music is hard-



PERHAPS you think that taking music lessons is like taking a dose of medicine. It isn't any longer!

As far as you're concerned, the old days of long practice hours with their horrid scales, hard-work exercises, and expensive personal teachers' fees are over and done with.

You have no excuses—no alibis whatsoever for not making your start towards musical good times *now!*

For, through a method that removes the boredom and extravagance from musical lessons, you can now learn to play your favorite instrument entirely at home—without a private teacher—in half the usual time—at a fraction of the usual cost.

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The lessons come to you by mail from the famous U. S. School of Music. They consist of complete printed instructions, diagrams, and all the music you need. You study at home and right from the start you are playing real tunes. Then, almost before you realize it, you are mastering a stirring march. As the lessons continue they prove easier and easier. For instead of just scales you are always learning to play by *actual notes* the classic favorites and the latest syncopation that formerly you only *listened* to.

And you're never in hot water. First, you are told how a thing is done. Then a picture *shows* you how, then you do it yourself and hear it. No private teacher could make it clearer or easier.

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If you're tired of doing the heavy looking on at parties—if always listening to others play has almost spoiled the pleasure of music for you—if you've been envious because they could entertain their friends and family—if learning music has always been one of those never-to-come-true dreams, let the time-proven and tested home-study method of the U. S. School of Music come to your rescue.

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Piccolo	Mandolin
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Our wonderful illustrated Free Book and our Free Demonstration Lesson explain all about this remarkable method. They prove just how anyone can learn to play his favorite instrument by note in almost no time and for just a fraction of what old slow methods cost. The booklet will also tell you all about the amazing new *Automatic Finger Control.*

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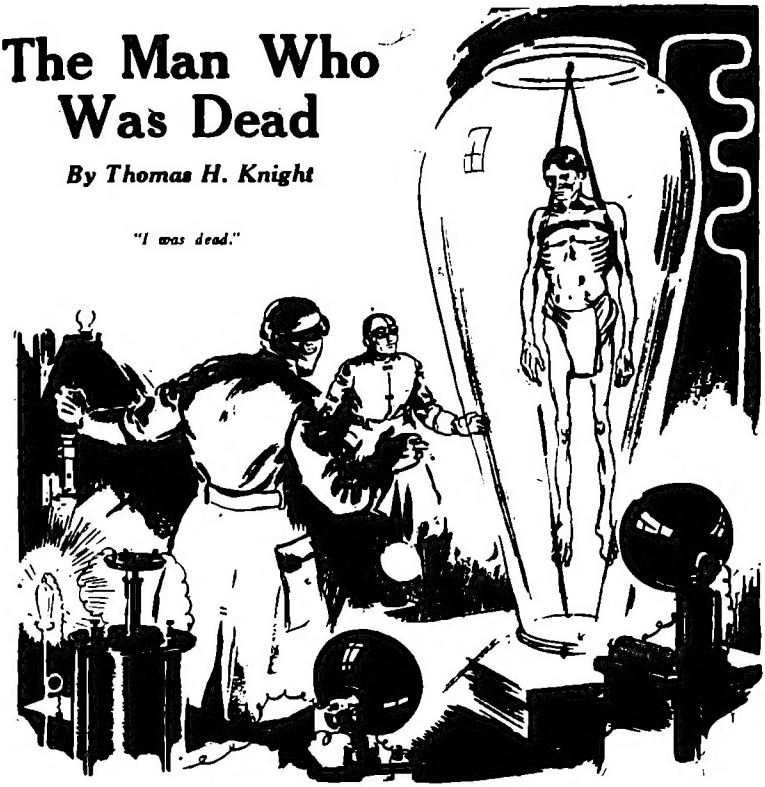
The Man Who Was Dead

By Thomas H. Knight



"I was dead."

IT was a wicked night, the night I met the man who had died. A bitter, heart-numbing night of weird, shrieking wind and flying snow. A few black hours I will never forget.

"Well, Jerry, lad!" my mother said to me as I pushed back from the table and started for my sheepskin coat and the lantern in the corner of the room. "Surely you're not going out a night like this? Goodness gracious, Jerry, it's not fit!"

"Can't help it, Mother," I replied. "Got to go. You've never seen me miss a Saturday night yet, have you now?"

"No. But then I've never seen a night like this for years either. Jerry, I'm really afraid. You may freeze before you even get as far as—"

As Jerry's eyes fell on the creature's head, he shuddered—for the face was nothing but bone, with dull-brown skin stretched taut over it. A skeleton that was alive!

"Ah, come now, Mother," I argued. "They'd guy me to death if I didn't sit in with the gang to-night. They'd chaff me because it was too cold for me to get out. But I'm no pampered sissy, you know, and I want to see—"

"Yes," she retorted bitingly, "I know. You want to go and bask in that elegant company. Our stove's just as good

as the one down at that dirty old store," continued my persistent and anxious parent, "and it's certainly not very flattering to think that you leave us a night like this to— Who'll be there, anyway?"

"Oh, the usual five or six I suppose," I answered as I adjusted the wick of my lantern, hearing as I did the snarl and cut of the wind through the evergreens in the yard.

"That black-whiskered sphinx, Hammersly, will he be there?"

"Yes, he'll be there, I'm pretty sure."

"Hm-m!" she exclaimed, her expression now carry all the contempt for my judgment and taste she intended it should. "Button your coat up good around your neck, then, if you must go to see your precious Hammersly and the rest of them. Have you ever heard that man say anything yet? Does he speak at all, Jerry?" Then her gentle mind, not at all accustomed to hard thoughts or contemptuous remarks, quickly changed. "Funny thing about that fellow," she mused. "He's got something on his mind. Don't you think so, Jerry?"

"Y-es, yes I do. And I've often wondered what it could be. He certainly's a queer stick. Got to admit that. Always brooding. Good fellow all right, and, for a 'sphinx' as you call him, likable. But I wonder what is eating him?"

"What do you suppose it could be, Jerry boy?" questioned mother following me to the door, the woman of her now completely forgetting her recent criticisms and, perhaps, the rough night her son was about to step into. "Do you suppose the poor chap has a —a—broken heart, or something like that? A girl somewhere who jilted him? Or maybe he loves someone he has no right to!" she finished excitedly, the plates in her hand rattling.

"Maybe it's worse than that," I ventured. "P'r'aps—I've no right to say it —but p'r'aps, and I've often thought it, there's a killing he wants to forget, and can't!"

I HEARD my mother's sharp little "Oh!" as I shut the door behind me and the warmth and comfort of the room away. Outside it was worse than the whistle of the wind through the trees had led me to expect. Black as pitch it was, and as cold as blazes. For the first moment or two, though, I liked the feel of the challenge of the night and the racing elements, was even a little glad I had added to the dare of the blackness the thought of Hammersly and his "killing." But I had not gone far before I was wishing I did not have to save my face by putting in an appearance at the store that night.

Every Saturday night, with the cows comfortable in their warm barn, and my own supper over, I was in the habit of taking my place on the keg or box behind the red-hot stove in Pruett's store. To-night all the snow was being hurled clear of the fields to block the roads full between the old, zigzag fences. The wind met me in great pushing gusts, and while it flung itself at me I would hang against it, snow to my knees, until the blow had gone along, when I could plunge forward again. I was glad when I saw the lights of the store, glad when I was inside.

They met me with mock applause for my pluck in facing the night, but for all their sham flattery I was pleased I had come, proud, I must admit, that I had been able to plough my heavy way through the drifts to reach them. I saw at a glance that my friends were all there, and I saw too that there was a strange man present.

A VERY tall man he was, gaunt and awkward as he leaned into the angle of the two counters, his back to a dusty show-case. He attracted my attention at once. Not merely because he appeared so long and pointed and skinny, but because, of all ridiculous things in that frozen country, he wore a hard derby hat! If he had not been such a queer character it would have

been laughable, but as it was it was—creepy. For the man beneath that hard hat was about as queer a looking character as I have ever seen. I supposed he was a visitor at the store, or a friend of one of my friends, and that in a little while I would be introduced. But I was not.

I took my place in behind the stove, feeling at once, though I am far from being unsociable usually, that the man was an intruder and would spoil the evening. But despite his cold, dampening presence we were soon at it, hammer and tongs, discussing the things that are discussed behind hospitable stoves in country stores on bad nights. But I could never lose sight of the fact that the stranger standing there, silent as the grave, was, to say the least, a queer one. Before long I was sure he was no friend or guest of anyone there, and that he not only cast a pall over me but over all of us. I did not like it, nor did I like him. Perhaps it would have been just as well after all, I thought, had I heeded my mother and stayed home.

Jed Counsell was the one who, innocently enough, started the thing that changed the evening, that had begun so badly, into a nightmare.

"Jerry," he said, leaning across to me, "thinkin' of you s'afternoon. Readin' an article about reincarnation. Remember we were arguin' it last week? Well, this guy, whoever he was I've forgot, believes in it. Say it's so. That people *do* come back." With this opening shot Jed sat back to await my answer. I liked these arguments and I liked to bear my share in them, but now, instead of immediately answering the challenge, I looked around to see if any other of our circle were going to answer Jed. Then, deciding it was up to me, I shrugged off the strange feeling the man in the corner had cast over me, and prepared to view my opinions.

"That's just that fellow's belief, Jed," I said. "And just as he's got his so have I mine. And on this subject at least I claim my opinion is as good as anybody's." I was just getting nicely started, and a little forgetting my distaste for the man in the corner, when the fellow himself interrupted. He left his leaning place and came creaking across the floor to our circle around the stove. I say he came "creaking" for as he came he did creak. "Shoes," I naturally, almost unconsciously decided, though the crazy notion was in my mind that the cracking I heard did sound like bones and joints and sinews badly in need of oil. The stranger sat his groaning self down among us, on a board lying across a nail keg and an old chair. Only from the corner of my eye did I see his movement, being friendly enough, despite my dislike, not to allow too marked notice of his attempt to be sociable seem inhospitable on my part. I was about to start again with my argument when Seth Spears, sitting closest to the newcomer, deliberately got up from the bench and went to the counter, telling Pruett as he went that he had to have some sugar. It was all a farce, a pretext, I knew. I've known Seth for years and had never known him before to take upon himself the buying for his wife's kitchen. Seth simply would not sit beside the man.

AT that I could keep my eyes from the stranger no longer, and the next moment I felt my heart turn over within me, then lie still. I have seen "walking skeletons" in circuses, but never such a man as the one who was then sitting at my right hand. Those side-show men were just lean in comparison to the fellow who had invaded our Saturday night club. His thighs and his legs and his knees, sticking sharply into his trousers, looked like pieces of inch board. His shoulders and his chest seemed as flat and as sharp as his legs. The sight of the man shocked me. I sprang to my feet thoroughly frightened. I could not see much of his face, sitting there in

the dark as he was with his back to the yellow light, but I could make out enough of it to know that it was in keeping with the rest of him.

In a moment or two, realizing my childishness, I had fought down my fear and, pretending that a scorching of my leg had caused my hurried movement, I sat down again. None of the others said a word, each waiting for me to continue and to break the embarrassing silence. Hammersly, black-whiskered, the "sphinx" as my mother had called him, watched me closely. Hating myself not a little bit for actually being the sissy I had boasted I was not, I spoke hurriedly, loudly, to cover my confusion.

"No sir, Jed!" I said, taking up my argument. "When a man's dead, he's dead! There's no bringing him back like that highbrow claimed. The old heart may be only hitting about once in every hundred times, and if they catch it right at the last stroke they may bring it back then, but once she's stopped, Jed, she's stopped for good. Once the pulse has gone, and life has flickered out, it's out. And it doesn't come back in any form at all, not in this world!"

I was glad when I had said it, thereby asserting myself and downing my foolish fear of the man whose eyes I felt burning into me. I did not turn to look at him but all the while I felt his gimlety eyes digging into my brain.

Then he spoke. And though he sat right next to me his voice sounded like a moan from afar off. It was the first time we had heard this thing that once may have been a voice and that now sounded like a groan from a closely nailed coffin. He reached a hand toword my knee to enforce his words, but I jerked away.

"So you don't believe a man can come back from the grave, eh?" he grated. "Believe that once a man's heart is stilled it's stopped for good, eh? Well, you're all wrong, sonny. All wrong! You believe these things. I *know* them!"

HIS interference, his condescension, his whole hatefulness angered me. I could now no longer control my feelings. "Oh! You *know*, do you?" I sneered. "On such a subject as this you're entitled to *know*, are you? Don't make me laugh!" I finished insultingly. I was aroused. And I'm a big fellow, with no reason to fear ordinary men.

"Yes, I know!" came back his echoing, scratching voice.

"How do you know? Maybe you've been—?"

"Yes, I have!" he answered, his voice breaking to a squeak. "Take a good look at me, gentlemen. A good look." He knew now that he held the center of the stage, that the moment was his. Slowly he raised an arm to remove that ridiculous hat. Again I jumped to my feet. For as his coat sleeve slipped down his forearm I saw nothing but bone supporting his hand. And the hand that then bared his head was a skeleton hand! Slowly the hat was lifted, but as quickly as light six able-bodied men were on their feet and half way to the door before we realized the cowardliness of it. We forced ourselves back inside the store very slowly, all of us rather ashamed of our ridiculous and childlike fear.

But it was all enough to make the blood curdle, with that live, dead thing sitting there by our fire. His face and skull were nothing but bone, the eyes deeply sunk into their sockets, the dull-brown skin like parchment in its tautness, drawn and shriveled down onto the nose and jaw. There were no cheeks. Just hollows. The mouth was a sharp slit beneath the flat nose. He was hideous.

"Come back and I'll tell you my yarn," he mocked, the slit that was his mouth opening a little to show us the empty, blackened gums. "I've been dead once," he went on, getting a lot of satisfaction from the weirdness of the lie and from our fear, "and *I* came back. Come and sit down and I'll explain why I'm this living skeleton."

WE came back slowly, and as I did I slipped my hand into my outside pocket where I had a revolver. I put my finger in on the trigger and got ready to use the vicious little thing. I was on edge and torn to pieces completely by the sight of the man, and I doubt not that had he made a move towards me my frayed nerves would have plugged him full of lead. I eyed my friends. They were in no better way than was I. Fright and horror stood on each face. Hammersly was worst. His hands were twitching, his eyes were like bright glass, his face bleached and drawn.

"I've quite a yarn to tell," went on the skeleton in his awful voice. "I've had quite a life. A full life. I've taken my fun and my pleasure wherever I could. Maybe you'll call me selfish and greedy, but I always used to believe that a man only passed this way once. Just like you believe," he nodded to me, his neck muscles and jaws creaking. "Six years ago I came up into this country and got a job on a farm," he went on, settling into his story. "Just an ordinary job. But I liked it because the farmer had a pretty little daughter of about sixteen or seventeen and as easy as could be. You may not believe it, but you can still find dames green enough to fall for the right story.

"This one did. I told her I was only out there for a time for my health. That I was rich back in the city, with a fine home and everything. She believed me. Little fool!" He chuckled as he said it, and my anger, mounting with his every devilish word, made the finger on the trigger in my pocket take a tighter crook to itself. "I asked her to skip with me," the droning went on, "made her a lot of great promises, and she fell for it." His dry jaw bones clanked and chattered as if he enjoyed the beastly recital of his achievement, while we sat gaping at him, believing either that the man must be mad, or that we were the mad ones, or dreaming.

"We slipped away one night," continued the beast. "Went to the city. To a punk hotel. For three weeks we stayed there. Then one morning I told her I was going out for a shave. I was. I got the shave. But I hadn't thought it worth while to tell her I wouldn't be back. Well, she got back to the farm some way, though I don't know—"

"WHAT!" I shouted, springing before him. "What! You mean you left her there! After you'd taken her, you left her! And here you sit crowing over it! Gloating! Boasting! Why you—!" I lived in a rough country. Associated with rough men, heard their vicious language, but seldom used a strong word myself. But as I stood over that monster, utterly hating the beastly thing, all the vile oaths and prickly language of the countryside, no doubt buried in some unused cell in my brain, spilled from my tongue upon him. When I had lashed him as fiercely as I was able I cried: "Why don't you come at me? Didn't you hear what I called you? You beast! I'd like to riddle you!" I shouted, drawing my gun.

"Aw, sit down!" he jeered, waving his rattling hand at me. "You ain't heard a thing yet. Let me finish. Well, she got back to the farm some way or another, and something over a year later I wandered into this country again too. I never could explain just why I came back. It was not altogether to see the girl. Her father was a little bit of a man and I began to remember what a meek and weak sheep he was. I got it into my head that it'd be fun to go back to his farm and rub it in. So I came.

"Her father was trying out a new corn planter right at the back door when I rounded the house and walked towards him. Then I saw, at once, that I had made a mistake. When he put his eyes on me his face went white and hard. He came down from the seat of that machine like a flash, and took

hurried steps in the direction of a doublebarrelled gun leaning against the woodshed. They always were troubled with hawks and kept a gun handy. But there was an ax nearer to me than the gun was to him. I had to work fast but I made it all right. I grabbed that ax, jumped at him as he reached for the gun, and swung—once. His wife, and the girl too, saw it. Then I turned and ran."

THE gaunt brute before us slowly crossed one groaning knee above the other. We were all sitting again now. The perspiration rolled down my face. I held my gun trained upon him, and, though I now believed he was totally mad, because of a certain ring of truth in that empty voice, I sat fascinated. I looked at Seth. His jaw was hanging loose, his eyes bulging. Hammersly's mouth was set in a tight clenched line, his eyes like fire in his blue, drawn face. I could not see the others.

"The telephone caught me," continued our ghastly story-teller, "and in no time at all I was convicted and the date set for the hanging. When my time was pretty close a doctor or scientist fellow came to see me who said, 'Blaggett, you're slated to die. How much will you sell me your body for?' If he didn't say it that way he meant just that. And I said, 'Nothing. I've no one to leave money to. What do you want with my body?' And he told me, 'I believe I can bring you back to life and health, provided they don't snap your neck when they drop you.' 'Oh, you're one of *those* guys, are you?' I said then. 'All right, hop to it. If you can do it I'll be much obliged. Then I can go back on that farm and do a little more ax swinging!'" Again came his horrible chuckle, again I mopped my brow.

"So we made our plans," he went on, pleased with our discomfiture and our despising of him. "Next day some chap came to see me, pretending he was my brother. And I carried out my part of it by cursing him at first and then begging him to give me decent burial. So he went away, and, I suppose, received permission to get me right after I was cut down.

"There was a fence built around the scaffold they had ready for me and the party I was about to fling, and they had some militia there, too. The crowd seemed quiet enough till they led me out. Then their buzzing sounded like a hive of bees getting all stirred up. Then a few loud voices, then shouts. Some rocks came flying at me after that, and it looked to me as though the hanging would not be so gentle a party after all. I tell you I was afraid. I wished it was over.

"THE mob pushed against the fence and flattened it out, coming over it like waves over a beach. The soldiers fired into the air, but still they came, and I, I ran—up onto the scaffold. It was safer!" As he said this he chuckled loudly. "I'll bet," he laughed, "that's the first time a guy ever ran into the noose for the safety of it! The mob came only to the foot of the scaffold though, from where they seemed satisfied to see the law take its course. The sheriff was nervous. So cut up that he only made a fling at tying my ankles, just dropped a rope around my wrists. He was like me, he wanted to get it over, and the crowd on its way. Then he put the rope around my neck, stepped back and shot the trap. Zamm! No time for a prayer—or for me to laugh at the offer!—or a last word or anything.

"I felt the floor give, felt myself shoot through. Smack! My weight on the end of the rope hit me behind the ears like a mallet. Everything went black. Of course it would have been just my luck to get a broken neck out of it and give the scientist no chance to revive me. But after a second or two, or a minute, or it could have been an hour, the blackness went away enough to allow me to know I was hanging on the end of the rope,

kicking, fighting, choking to death. My tongue swelled, my face and head and heart and body seemed ready to burst. Slowly I went into a deep mist that I knew then was *the* mist, then—then—I was off floating in the air over the heads of the crowd, watching my own hanging!

"I saw them give that slowly swinging carcass on the end of its rope time enough to thoroughly die, then, from my aerial, unseen watching place, I saw them cut it—me—down. They tried the pulse of the body that had been mine, they examined my staring eyes. Then I heard them pronounce me dead. The fools! I had known I was dead for a minute or two by that time, else how could my spirit have been gone from the shell and be out floating around over their heads?"

HE paused here as he asked his question, his head turning on its dry and creaking neck to include us all in his query. But none of us spoke. We were dreaming it all, of course, or were mad, we thought.

"In just a short while," went on the skeleton, "my 'brother' came driving slowly in for my body. With no special hurry he loaded me onto his little truck and drove easily away. But once clear of the crowd he pushed his foot down on the gas and in five more minutes—with me hovering all the while alongside of him, mind you—floating along as though I had been a bird all my life—we turned into the driveway of a summer home. The scientific guy met him. They carried me into the house, into a fine-fitted laboratory. My dead body was placed on a table, a huge knife ripped my clothes from me.

"Quickly the loads from ten or a dozen hypodermic syringes were shot into different parts of my naked body. Then it was carried across the room to what looked like a large glass bottle, or vase, with an opening in the top. Through this door I was lowered, my body being held upright by straps in there for that purpose. The door to the opening was then placed in position, and by means of an acetylene torch and some easily melting glass, the door was sealed tight.

"So there stood my poor old body. Ready for the experiment to bring it back to life. And as my new self floated around above the scientist and his helper I smiled to myself, for I was sure the experiment would prove a failure, even though I now knew that the sheriff's haste had kept him from placing the rope right at my throat and had saved me a broken neck. I was dead. All that was left of me now was my spirit, or soul. And that was swimming and floating about above their heads with not an inclination in the world to have a thing to do with the husk of the man I could clearly see through the glass of the bell.

"THEY turned on a huge battery of ultra-violet rays then," continued the hollow droning of the man who had been hanged, "which, as the scientist had explained to me while in prison, acting upon the contents of the syringes, by that time scattered through my whole body, was to renew the spark of life within the dead thing hanging there. Through a tube, and by means of a valve entering the glass vase in the top, the scientist then admitted a dense white gas. So thick was it that in a moment or two my body's transparent coffin appeared to be full of a liquid as white as milk. Electricity then revolved my cage around so that my body was insured a complete and even exposure to the rays of the green and violet lamps. And while all this silly stuff was going on, around and around the laboratory I floated, confident of the complete failure of the whole thing, yet determined to see it through if for no other reason than to see the discomfiture and disappointment that this mere man was bound to experience. You see, I was already looking back upon earthly mortals as being inferior, and now as I waited for this proof I was

all the while fighting off a new urge to be going elsewhere. Something was calling me, beckoning me to be coming into the full spirit world. But I wanted to see this wise earth guy fail."

"For a little while conditions stayed the same within that glass. So thick was the liquid gas in there at first that I could see nothing. Then it began to clear, and I saw to my surprise that the milky gas was disappearing because it was being forced in by the rays from the lights in through the pores into the body itself. As though my form was sucking it in like a sponge. The scientist and his helper were tense and taut with excitement. And suddenly my comfortable feeling left me. Until then it had seemed so smooth and velvety and peaceful drifting around over their heads, as though lying on a soft, fleecy cloud. But now I felt a sudden squeezing of my spirit body. Then I was in an agony. Before I knew what I was doing my spirit was clinging to the outside of that twisting glass bell, clawing to get into the body that was coming back to life! The glass now was perfectly clear of the gas, though as yet there was no sign of life in the body inside to hint to the scientist that he was to be successful. But I knew it. For I fought desperately to break in through the glass to get back into my discarded shell of a body again, knowing I must get in or die a worse death than I had before.

"Then my sharper eyes noted a slight shiver passing over the white thing before me, and the scientist must have seen it in the next second, for he sprang forward with a choking cry of delight. Then the lolling head inside lifted a bit. I—still desperately clinging with my spirit hands to the outside, and all the time growing weaker and weaker—I saw the breast of my body rise and fall. The assistant picked up a heavy steel hammer and stood ready to crash open the glass at the right moment. Then my once dead eyes opened in there to look around, while I, clinging and gasping outside, just as I had on the scaffold, went into a deeper, darker blackness than ever. Just before my spirit life died utterly I saw the eyes of my body realize completely what was going on, then—from the inside now—I saw the scientist give the signal that caused the assistant to crash away the glass shell with one blow of his hammer.

"They reached in for me then, and I fainted. When I came back to consciousness I was being carefully, slowly revived, and nursed back to life by oxygen and a pulmotor."

THE terrible creature telling us this tale paused again to look around. My knees were weak, my clothes wet with sweat.

"Is that all?" I asked in a piping, strange voice, half sarcastic, half unbelieving, and wholly spellbound.

"Just about," he answered. "But what do you expect? I left my friend the scientist at once, even though he did hate to see me go. It had been all right while he was so keen on the experiment himself and while he only half believed his ability to bring me back. But now that he'd done it, it kinda worried him to think what sort of a man he was turning loose of the world again. I could see how he was figuring, and because I had no idea of letting him try another experiment on me, p'r'aps of putting me away again, I beat it in a hurry.

"That was five years ago. For five years I've lived with only just part of me here. Whatever it was trying to get back into that glass just before my body came to life—my spirit, I've been calling it—I've been without. It never did get back. You see, the scientist brought me back inside a shell that kept my spirit out. That's why I'm the skeleton you see I am. Something vital is missing."

He stood up cracking and creaking before us, buttoning his loose coat about his angular body. "Well, boys," he asked lightly, "what do you think of that?"

"I think you're a liar! A damn liar!" I cried. "And now, if you don't want me to fill you full of lead, get out of here and get out now! If I have to do it to you, there's no scientist this time to bring you back. When you go out you'll stay out!"

"Don't worry," he grimaced back to me, waving a mass of bones that should have been a hand contemptuously at me, "I'm going. I'm headed for Shelton." He stalked the length of the floor and shut the door behind him. The beast had gone.

"The dirty liar!" I cried. "I wish—yes—I wish I had an excuse to kill him. Just think of that being loose, will you? A brute who would think up such a yarn! Of course it's all absurd. All crazy. All a lie."

"No. It's not a lie."

I TURNED to see who had spoken. Hammersly's voice was so unfamiliar and now so torn in addition that I could not have thought he had spoken, had he not been looking right at me, his glittering eyes challenging my assertion. Would wonders never cease? I asked myself. First this outrageous yarn, now Hammersly, the "sphinx," expressing an opinion, looking for an argument! Of course it must be that his susceptible and brooding brain had been turned a bit by the evening we had just experienced.

"Why Hammersly! You don't believe it?" I asked.

"I not only believe it, Jerry, but now it's my turn to say, as he did, I *know* it! Jerry, old friend," he went on, "that devil told the truth. He *was* hanged. He was brought back to life; and Jerry—I was that scientist!"

Whew! I fell back to a box again. My knees seemed to forsake me. Then I heard Hammersly talking to himself.

"Five years it's been," he muttered. "Five years since I turned him loose again. Five years of agony for me, wondering what new devilish crimes he was perpetrating, wondering when he would return to that little farm to swing his ax again. Five years—five years."

He came over to me, and without a word of explanation or to ask my permission he reached his hand into my pocket and drew out my revolver, and I did not protest.

"He said he was headed for Shelton," went on Hammersly's spoken thoughts. "If I slip across the ice I can intercept him at Black's woods." Buttoning his coat closely, he followed the stranger out into the night.

I WAS glad the moon had come up for my walk home, glad too when I had the door locked and propped with a chair behind me. I undressed in the dark, not wanting any grisly, sunken-eyed monster to be looking in through the window at me. For maybe, so I thought, maybe he was after all not headed for Shelton, but perhaps planning on another of his ghastly tricks.

But in the morning we knew he had been going toward Shelton. Scientists, doctors, and learned men of all descriptions came out to our village to see the thing the papers said Si Waters had stumbled upon when on his way to the creamery that next morning.

It was a skeleton, they said, only that it had a dry skin all over it. A mummy. Could not have been considered capable of containing life only that the snow around it was lightly blotched with a pale smear that proved to be blood, that had oozed out from the six bullet holes in the horrid chest. They never did solve it.

There were five of us in the store that night. Five of us who know. Hammersly did what we all wanted to do. Of course his name is not really Hammersly, but it has done here as well as another. He is black-whiskered though, and he is still very much of a sphinx, but he'll never have to answer for having killed the man he once brought back to life. Hammersly's secret will go into five other graves besides his own.

"Now," said Klaig hoarsely, "watch closely, for God's sake!"

Monsters of Moyen

By Arthur J. Burks

Foreword

IN 1985 the mighty genius of Moyen gripped the Eastern world like a hand of steel. In a matter of months he had welded the Orient into an unbeatable war-machine. He had, through the sheer magnetism of a strange personality, carried the Eastern world with him on his march to conquest of the earth, and men followed him with blind faith as men in the past have followed the banners of the Thaumaturgists.

A strange name, to the sound of which none could assign nationality. Some said his father was a Russian refugee, his mother a Mongol woman. Some said he was the son of a Caucasian woman lost in the Gobi and rescued by a mad

"The Western World shall be next!" was the dread ultimatum of the half-monster, half-god Moyen!

lama of Tibet, who became father of Moyen. Some said that his mother was a goddess, his father a fiend out of hell.

But this all men knew about him: that he combined within himself the courage of a Hannibal, the military genius of a Napoleon, the ideals of a Sun Yat Sen; and that he had sworn to himself he would never rest until the earth was peopled by a single nation, with Moyen himself in the seat of the mighty ruler.

Madagascar was the seat of his government, from which he looked across into United Africa, the first to join his confederacy. The Orient was a dependency, even to that forbidden land of the Goloks, where outlanders sometimes went, but whence they never returned—and to the wild Goloks he was a god whose will was absolute, to render obedience to whom was a privilege occorded only to the Chosen.

IN a short year his confederacy had brought under his might the millions of Asia, which he had welded into a mighty machine for further conquest.

And because the Americas saw the

handwriting on the wall, they sent out to see the man Moyen, with orders to penetrate to his very side, as a spy, their most trusted Secret Agent—Prester Kleig.

Only the ignorant believed that Moyen was mad. The military and diplomatic geniuses of the world recognized his genius, and resented it.

But Prester Kleig, of the Secret Service of the Americas, one of the few men whose headquarters were in the Secret Room in Washington, had reached Moyen.

Now he was coming home.

He came home to tell his people what Moyen was planning, and to admit that his investigations had been hampered at every turn by the uncanny genius of Moyen. Military plans had been guarded with unbelievable secrecy. War machines he knew to exist, yet had seen only those common to all the armies of the world.

And now, twenty-four hours out of New York City, aboard the *S. S. Stellar*, Prester Kleig was literally willing the steamer to greater speed—and in far Madagascar the strange man called Moyen had given the ultimatum:

"The Western World shall be next!"

CHAPTER I

The Hand of Moyen

"WHO is that man?" asked a young lady passenger of the steward, with the imperious inflection which tells of riches able to force obedience from menials who labor for hire.

She pointed a bejeweled finger at the slender, soldierly figure which stood in the prow of the liner, like a figurehead, peering into the storm under the vessel's forefoot.

"That gentleman, milady?" repeated the steward obsequiously. "That is Prester Kleig, head of the Secret Agents, Master of the Secret Room, just now returning from Madagascar, via Europe, after a visit to the realm of Moyen."

A gasp of terror burst from the lips of the woman. Her cheeks blanched.

"Moyen!" She almost whispered it. "Moyen! The half-good of Asia, whom men call mad!"

"Not mad, milady. No, Moyen is not mad, save with a lust for power. He is the conqueror of the ages, already ruling more of the earth's population than any man has ever done before him—even Alexander!"

But the young lady was not listening to stewards. Wealthy young ladies did not, save when asked questions dealing with personal service to themselves. Her eyes devoured the slender man who stood in the prow of the *Stellar*, while her lips shaped, over and over again, the dread name which was on the lips of the people of the world:

"Moyen! Moyen!"

UP in the prow, if Prester Kleig, who carried a dread secret in his breast, knew of the young lady's regard, he gave no sign. There were touches of gray at his temples, though he was still under forty. He had seen more of life, knew more of its terrors, than most men twice his age—because he had lived harshly in service to his country.

He was thinking of Moyen, the genius of the misshapen body, the pale eyes which reflected the fires of a Satanic soul, set deeply in the midst of the face of an angel; and wondering if he would be able to arrive in time, sorry that he had not returned home by airplane.

He had taken the *Stellar* only because the peacefulness of ocean liner travel would aid his thoughts, and he required time to marshal them. Liner travel was now a luxury, as all save the immensely wealthy traveled by plane across the oceans. Now Prester Kleig was sorry, for any moment, he felt, Moyen might strike.

He turned and looked back along the deck of the *Stellar*. His eyes played over the trimly gowned figure of the woman who questioned the steward,

but did not really see her. And then. . . .

"Great God!" The words were a prayer, and they burst from the lips of Prester Kleig like an explosion. Passengers appeared from the lee of lifeboats. Officers on the bridge whirled to look at the man who shouted. Seamen paused in their labors to stare. Aloft in the crow's-nest the lookout lowered his eyes from scouring the horizon to stare at Prester Kleig —who was pointing.

All eyes turned in the direction indicated.

CLIMBING into the sky, a mile off the starboard beam, was an airplane with a bulbous body and queerly slanted wings. It had neither wheels nor pontoons, and it traveled with unbelievable speed. It came on bullet-fast, headed directly for the side of the *Stellar*.

"Lower the boats!" yelled Kleig. "Lower the boats! For God's sake lower the boats!"

For Prester Kleig, in that casual turning, had seen what none aboard the *Stellar*, even the lookout above, had seen. The airplane, which had neither wheels nor pontoons, had risen, as Aphrodite is said to have risen, out of the waves! He had seen the wings come out of the bulbous body, snap backward into place, and the plane was in full flight the instant it appeared.

Prester Kleig had no hope that his warning would be in time, but he would always feel better for having given it. As the captain debated with himself as to whether this lunatic should be confined as dangerous, the strange airplane nosed over and dived down to the sea, a hundred yards from the side of the *Stellar*. Just before it struck the water, its wings snapped forward and became part of the bulbous body of the thing, the whole of which shot like a bullet into the sea.

PRESTER KLEIG stood at the rail, peering out at the spot where the plane had plunged in with scarcely a splash, and his right hand was raised as though he gave a final, despairing signal.

Of all aboard the *Stellar*, he only saw that black streak which, ten feet under water, raced like a bolt of lightning from the nose of the submerged but visible plane, straight as a die for the side of the *Stellar*. Just a black streak, no bigger than a small man's arm, from the nose of the plane to the side of the *Stellar*.

From the crow's-nest came the startled, terrific voice of the lookout, in the beginning of a cry that must remain forever inarticulate.

The world, in that blinding moment, seemed to rock on its foundations; to shatter itself to bits in a chaotic jumble of sound and of movement, shot through and through with lurid flames. Kleig felt himself hurled upward and outward, turned over and over endlessly. . . .

He felt the storm-tossed waters close over him, and knew he had struck. In the moment he knew—oblivion, deep, ebon and impenetrable, blotted out knowledge.

CHAPTER II

The Half-Dream

A ROARING, rushing river of chaotic sound, first. Jumbled sound to which Prester Kleig could give no adequate name. But as he tried to analyze its meanings, he was able to differentiate between sounds, and to discover the identity of some.

The river of sound he decided to be the sound of a vibrational explosion of some sort — vibrational because it had that quivery quality which causes a feeling of uneasiness and fret, that feeling which makes one turn and look around to find the eyes boring into one's back—yet multiplied in its intensity an uncounted number of times.

Other sounds which came through the chaotic river of sound were the terrified screaming of the men and women who were doomed. Lifeboats were never lowered, for the reason that

with the disintegration of the *Stellar*, everything inanimate aboard her likewise disintegrated, dropping men and women, crew and passengers, into the freezing waters of the Atlantic.

Prester Kleig dropped with them, only partially unconscious after the first icy plunge. He knew when he floated on the surface, for he felt himself lifted and hurled by the waves. In his half-dream he saw men and women being carried away into wave-shrouded darkness, clawing wildly at nothingness for support, clawing at one another, locking arms, and going down together.

THE *Stellar*, in the merest matter of seconds, had become spoil of the sea, and her crew and passengers had vanished forever from the sight of men. Yet Prester Kleig lived on, knew that he lived on, and that there was an element, too strong to be disbelieved, of reality in his dream.

There was a vibratory sense, too, as of the near activity of a noiseless motor. Noiseless motor! Where had he last thought of those two words? With what recent catastrophe were they associated? No, he could not recall, though he knew he should be able to do so.

Then the sense of motion to the front was apparent—an unnumbered sense, rather than concrete feeling. Motion to front, influenced by the rising and falling motion of mountainous waves.

So suddenly as to be a distinct shock, the wave motion ceased, though the forward motion—and *upward!*—not only continued but increased.

That airplane of the bulbous body, the queerly slanted wings. . . .

But the glimmering of realization vanished as a sickishly sweet odor assailed his nostrils and sent its swift-moving tentacles upward to wrap themself soothingly about his brain. But the sense of flight, unbelievably swift, was present and recognizable, though all else eluded him. He had the impression, however, that it was intended that all save the most vagrant, most widely differentiated impressions elude him—that he should acquire only half pictures, which would therefore be all the more terrible in retrospect.

The only impressions which were real were those of motion to the front, and upward, and the sense of noiseless machinery, vibrating the whole, nearby.

Then a distinct realization of the cessation of the sense of flying, and a return, though in lesser degree, of the rising and falling of waves. This latter sensation became less and less, though the feeling of traveling downward continued. Prester Kleig knew that he was going down into the sea again, down into it deeply. . . . Then that odor once more, and the elusive memory.

Forward motion at last, in the depths, swift, forward motion, though Prester Kleig could not even guess at the direction. Just swift motion, and the mutter of voices, the giving of orders....

PRESTER KLEIG regained consciousness fully on the sands of the shore. He sat up stiffly, staring out to sea. A storm was raging, and the sea was an angry waste. No ship showed on the waters; the mad, tumbled sky above it was either empty of planes or they had climbed to invisibility above the clouds that raced and churned with the storm.

Out of the storm, almost at Prester Kleig's feet, dropped a small airplane. Through the window a familiar face peered at Kleig. A helmeted, begoggled figure opened the door and stepped out.

"Kleig, old man," said the flyer, "you gave me the right dope all right, but I'll swear there isn't a wireless tower within a hundred miles of this place! How did you manage it?"

"Kane, you're crazy, or I am, or. . . ." But Prester Kleig could not go on with the thought which had rushed through his brain with the numbing impact of a blow. He grasped the hand of Carlos

Kane, of the Domestic Service, and the yellow flimsy Kane held out to him. It read simply:

"Shipwrecked. Am ashore at—" There followed grid coordinate map readings. "Come at once, prepared to fly me to Washington." It was signed "Kleig."

"Kane," said Kleig, "I did not send this message!"

What more was there to be said? Horror looked out of the eyes of Prester Kleig, and was reflected in those of Carlos Kane. Both men turned, peering out across the tumbled welter of waters.

Somewhere out there, tight-locked in the gloomy archives of the Atlantic, was the secret of the message which had brought Carlos Kane to Prester Kleig—and the agency which had sent it.

CHAPTER III

Wings of To-morrow

AS Prester Kleig climbed into the enclosed passenger pit of the monoplane — a Mayther — his ears seemed literally to be ringing with the drumming, mighty voice of Moyen. But now that voice, instead of merely speaking, rang with sardonic laughter. He had never heard the laughter of Moyen, but he could guess how it would sound.

That airplane of the slanted wings, the bulbous, almost bulletlike fuselage, what of it? It was simple, as Kleig looked back at his memoried glimpse of it. The submarine was a metal fish made with human hands; the airplane aped the birds. The strange ship which had caused the destruction of the *Stellar*, was a combination fish and bird—which merely aped nature a bit further, as anyone who had ever traversed tropical waters would have instantly recognized.

But what did it portend? What ghastly terrors of Moyen roamed the deeps of the Atlantic, of the Pacific, the oceans of the world? How close were some of these to the United States?

The pale eyes of Moyen, he was sure, were already turned toward the West.

PRESTER KLEIG sighed as he seated himself beside Carlos Kane. Then Kane pressed one of the myriad of buttons on the dash, and Kleig lifted his eyes to peer through the skylight, to where that single press of a button had set in motion the intricate machinery of the helicopter.

A four-bladed fan lifted on a slender pedestal, sufficiently high above the surface of the wing for the vanes to be free of the central propeller. Then, automatically, the vanes became invisible, and the Mayther lifted from the sandy beach as lightly, and far more straightly, than any bird.

As the ship climbed away for the skies, and through the transparent floor the beach and the Atlantic fell away below the ship, a sigh of relief escaped Kleig. This was living! Up here one was free, if only for a moment, and the swift wind of flight brushed all cobwebs from the tired human brain. He watched the slender needle of the altimeter, as it moved around the face of the dial as steadily as the hands of a clock, around to thirty thousand, thirty-five, forty.

Then Carlos Kane, every movement as effortless as the flight of the silvery winged Mayther, thrust forth his hand to the dash again, pressed another button. Instantly the propellers vanished into a blur as the vanes of the helicopter dropped down the slender staff and the vanes themselves fitted snugly into their appointed notches atop the wing.

FOR a second Carlos Kane glanced at the tiny map to the right of the dash, and set his course. It was a matter of moments only, but while Kane worked, Prester Kleig studied the instruments on the dash, for it had been months since he had flown, save for his recent half-dreamlike experience. There

was a button which released the mechanism of the deadly guns, fired by compressed air, all operated from the noiseless motor, whose muzzles exactly cleared the tips of Mayther's wings, two guns to each wing, one on the entering edge, one on the trailing edge, fitted snugly into the adamant rigging.

Four guns, which could fire to right or left, twin streams of lead, the number of rounds governed only by the carrying power of the Mayther. Prester Kleig knew them all: the guns in the wings, the guns which fired through the three propellers, and the guns set two and two in the fuselage, to right and left of the pits, which could be fired either up or down—all by the mere pressing of buttons. It was marvelous, miraculous, yet even as Kleig told himself that this was so, he felt, deep in the heart of him, that Moyen knew all about ships like these, and regarded them as the toys of children.

Kane touched Kleig on the shoulder, signaling, indicating that the atmosphere in the pits had been regulated to their new height, and that they could remove their helmets and oxygen tanks without danger.

WITH a sigh Prester Kleig sat back, and the two friends turned to face each other.

"You certainly look done in, Kleig," said Kane sympathetically. "You must have been through hell, and then some. Tell me about this Moyen; that is, if you think you care to talk about him."

"Talk about him!" repeated Kleig. "Talk about him? It will be a relief! There has been nothing, and nobody, on my mind save Moyen for weary months on end. If I don't talk to someone about him, I'll go mad, if I'm not mad already. Moyen? A monster with the face of an angel! What else can one say about him? A devil and a saint, a brute whose followers would go with him into hell's fire, and sing him hosannas as they were consumed in agony! The greatest mob psychologist the world has ever seen. He's a genius, Kane, and unless something is done, the Western world, all the world, is doomed to sit at the feet, listen to the commands, of Moyen!

"He isn't an Oriental; he isn't a European; he isn't negroid or Indian; but there is something about him that makes one thing of all of these, singly and collectively. His body is twisted and grotesque, and when one looks at his face, one feels a desire to touch him, to swear eternal fealty to him—until one looks into his pale eyes, eyes almost milky in their paleness—and gets the merest hint of the thoughts which actuate him. If he has a failing I did not find it. He does not drink, gamble. . . ."

"And women?" queried Kane, softly.

KLEIG was madly in love with the sister of Kane, Charmion, and this thing touched him nearest the heart, because Charmion was one of her country's most famous beauties, about whom Moyen must already have heard.

"Women?" repeated Kleig musingly, his black eyes troubled, haunted. "I scarcely know. He has no love for women, only because he has no capacity for any love save self-love. But when I think of him in this connection I seem to see Moyen, grown to monster proportions, sitting on a mighty throne, with nude women groveling at his feet, bathed in tears, their long hair in manles of sorrow, hiding their shamed faces! That sounds wild, doesn't it? But it's the picture I get of Moyen when I think of Moyen and of women. Many women will love him, and have, perhaps. But while he has taken many, though I am only guessing here, he has given *himself* to none. Another thing: His followers—well, he sets no limits to the lusts of his men, requiring only that every soldier be fit for duty, with a body strong for hardship. You understand?"

Kane understood, and his face was very pale.

"Yes," he said, his voice almost a whisper, "I understand, and as you speak of this man I seem to see a city in ruins, and hordes of men marching, bloodstained men entering houses . . . from which, immediately afterward, come the screams of women . . . terror-stricken women. . . ."

He shuddered and could not go on for the very horror of the vision that had come to him.

But Kleig stared at him as though he saw a ghost.

"Great God, Carl!" he gasped. "The same identical picture has been in my mind, not once but a thousand times! I wonder. . . ."

Was it an omen of the future for the West?

Deep in his soul Prester Kleig fancied he could hear the sardonic laughter of the half-god, Moyen.

A TINY bell rang inside the dash, behind the instruments. Kane had set direction finders, had pressed the button which signaled the Washington-control Station of the National Radio, thus automatically indicating the exact spot above land, by grid-coordinates, where the Mayther should start down for the landing.

An hour later they landed on the flat roof of the new Capitol Building, sinking lightly to rest as a feather, nursed to a gentle landing by the whirring vanes of the helicopter.

Prester Kleig, surrounded by uniformed guards who tried to shield him from the gaze of news-gatherers crowded there on the roof-top, hurried him to the stairway leading into the executive chambers, and through these to the Secret Chamber which only a few men knew, and into which not even Carlos Kane could follow Prester Kleig—yet.

But one man, one news-gatherer, had caught a glimpse of the face of Kleig, and already he raced for the radio tower of his organization, to blazon to the Western world the fact that Kleig had come back.

CHAPTER IV

A Nation Waits in Dread

AS Prester Kleig, looking twice his forty years because of fatigue, and almost nameless terrors through which he had passed, went to his rendezvous, the news-gatherer, who shall here remain nameless, raced for the Broadcasting Tower.

As Prester Kleig entered the Secret Room and at a signal all the many doors behind him, along that interminable stairway, swung shut and were tightly locked, the news-gatherer raced for the microphone and gave the "priority" signal to the operator. Millions of people would not only hear the words of the news-gatherer, but would see him, note the expressions which chased one another across his face. For television was long since an accomplished, everyday fact.

"Prester Kleig, of this government's Secret Service, has just returned to the United Americas! Your informer has just seen him step from the monoplane of Carlos Kane, atop the Capitol Building, and repair at once to the Secret Room, closely guarded. But I saw his face, and though he is under forty, he seems twice that. And you know now what this country has only guessed at before—that he has seen Moyen. Moyen the half-man, half-god, the enigma of the ages. What does Prester Kleig think of this man? He doesn't say, for he dares not speak, yet. But your informer saw his face, and it is old and twisted with terror! And—"

THAT ended the discourse of the news-gatherer, and it was many hours before the public really understood. For, with a new sentence but half completed, the picture of the news-gatherer faded blackly off the screens in a million homes, and his voice was blotted out by a humming that mounted to a terrific, appalling shriek! Some terrible agency, about which people who knew their radio could only guess, had drowned out the words of the

news-gatherer, leaving the public stunned and bewildered, almost groping before a feeling of terror which was all the more unbearable because none could give it a name.

And the public had heard but a fraction of the truth—merely that Kleig had come back. It had been the intention of the government to deny the public even this knowledge, and it had; but knowledge of the denial itself was public property, which filled the hearts of men and women all through the Western Hemisphere with nameless dread. And over all this abode of countless millions hovered the shadow of Moyen.

The government tried to correct the impression which the news-gatherer had given out.

"Prester Kleig is back," said the radio, while the government speaker tried, for the benefit of those who could see him, to smile reassuringly. "But there is nothing to cause anyone the slightest concern. He has seen Moyen, yes, and has heard him speak, but still there is nothing to distress anyone, and the whole story will be given to you as soon as possible. Kleig has gone into the Secret Room, yes, but every operative of the government, when discussing business connected with diplomatic relations with foreign powers, is received in the Secret Room. No cause for worry!"

IT was so easy to say that, and the speaker realized it, which was why he could but with difficulty make his smile seem reassuring.

"Tell us the truth, and tell us quickly," might have been the voiceless cries of those who listened and saw the face and fidgetting form of the speaker. But the words were not spoken, because the people sensed a hovering horror, a dread catastrophe beyond the power of words to express—and so looked at one another in silence, their eyes wide with dread, their hearts throbbing to suffocation with nameless foreboding.

So eyes were horror-haunted, and men walked, flew, and rode in fear and trembling—while, down in the Secret Room, Prester Kleig and a dozen old men, men wise in the ways of science and invention, wise in the ways of men and of beasts, of Nature and the Infinite Outside, decided the fate of the Nation.

That Secret Room was closed to every one. Not even the news-gatherers could reach it; not even the all-seeing eye of the telephotograph emblazoned to the world its secrets.

But *was* it secret?

Perhaps Moyen, the master mobster, smiled when he heard men say so, men who knew in their hearts that Moyen regarded other earthlings as earthlings regard children and their toys. Did the eyes of Moyen gaze even into the depths of the Secret Room, hundreds of feet below even the documentary-treasure vaults of the Capitol?

NO one knew the answer to the question, but the radio, reporting the return of Kleig, had given the public a distorted vision of an embodied fear, and in its heart the public answered "Yes!" And what had drowned out the voice of the radio-reporter?

No wonder that, for many hours, a nation waited in fear and trembling, eyes filled with dread that was nameless and absolute, for word from the Secret Room. Fear mounted and mounted as the hours passed and no word came.

In that room Prester Kleig and the twelve old men, one of whom was the country's President, held counsel with the man who had come back. But before the spoken counsel had been held, awesome and awe-inspiring pictures had flashed across the screen, invented by a third of the old men, from which the world held no secrets, even the secrets of Moyen.

With this mechanism, guarded at forfeit of the lives of a score of men, the men of the Secret Room could peer into even the most secret places of the world. The old men had peered, and

had seen things which had blanched their pale cheeks anew. And when they had finished, and the terrible pictures had faded out, a voice had spoken suddenly, like an explosion, in the Secret Room.

"Well, gentlemen, are you satisfied that resistance is futile?"

Just the voice; but to one man in the Secret Room, and to the others when his numbing lips spoke the name, it was far more than enough. For not even the wisest of the great men could explain how, as they knew, having just seen him there, a man could be in Madagascar while his voice spoke aloud in the Secret Room, where even radio was barred!

The name on the lips of Prester Kleig!

"Moyen! Moyen!"

CHAPTER V

Monsters of the Deep

"GENTLEMEN," said Prester Kleig as he entered the Secret Room, where sat the scientists and inventive geniuses of the Americas, "we haven't much time, and I shall waste but little of it. Moyen is ready to strike, if he hasn't already done so, as I believe. We will see in a matter of seconds. Professor Maniel, we shall need, first of all, your apparatus for returning the vibratory images of events which have transpired within the last thirty-six hours.

"I wish to show those of you who failed to see it the sinking of the *Stellar*, on which I was a passenger and, I believe, the only survivor."

Professor Maniel, strangely mouselike save for the ponderous dome of his forehead, stepped away from the circular table without a word. He had invented the machine in question, and he was inordinately proud of it. Through its use he could pick up the sounds, and the pictures, of events which had transpired down the past centuries, from the tinkling of the cymbals of Miriam to all the horror of the conflict men had called the Great War, simply by drawing back from the ether, as the sounds fled outward through space, those sounds and vibrations which he needed.

His science was an exact one, more carefully exact even than the measurement of the speed of light, taking into consideration the dispersion of sound and movement, and the element of time.

The interior of the Secret Room became dark as Maniel labored with his minute machinery. Only behind the screen on the wall in rear of the table was there light.

THE voice of Maniel began to drone as he thought aloud.

"There is a matter of but a few minutes difference in time between Washington and the last recorded location of the *Stellar*. The sinking occurred at ten-thirty last evening you say, Kleig? Ah, yes, I have it! Watch carefully, gentlemen!"

So silent were the Secret Agents one could not even have heard the breathing of one of them, for on the screen, misty at first, but becoming moment by moment bolder of outline, was the face of a storm-tossed sea. The liner was slower in forming, and was slightly out of focus for a second or two.

"Ah," said Professor Maniel, "there it is!"

Through the sound apparatus came the roaring and moaning of a storm at sea. On the screen the *Stellar* rose high on the waves, dropped into the trough, while spumes of black smoke spread rearward on the waters from her spouting funnels. Figures were visible on her decks, figures which seemed carved in bronze.

In the prow, every expression on his face plainly visible, stood Prester Kleig himself, and as his picture appeared he was in the act of turning.

"Now," said Kleig himself, there in the Secret Room, "look off to the left, gentlemen, a mile from the *Stellar!*"

A rustling sound as the scientists shifted in their places.

THEY all saw it, and a gasp burst from their lips as though at a signal. For, as the *Stellar* seemed about to plunge off the shadowed screen into the Secret Room, a flying thing had risen out of the sea—an airplane with a bulbous body and queerly slanting wings.

At the same time, out of the mouth of the pictured figure of Prester Kleig, clear and agonized as the tones of a bell struck in frenzy, the words:

"Great God! Lower the boats! Lower the boats! For God's sake lower the boats!"

In the Secret Room the real Prester Kleig spoke again.

"When the black streak leaves the nose of the plane, after it has submerged, Professor Maniel," said Kleig softly, "slow your mechanism so that we can see the whole thing in detail."

There came a grunted affirmative from Professor Maniel.

The nose of the pictured plane tilted over, diving down for the surface of the sea.

"Now!" snapped Kleig, "don't wait!"

Instantly the moving pictures on the screen reduced their speed, and the plane appeared to stop its sudden seaward plunge and to drop down as lightly as a feather. The wings of the thing moved forward slowly, folding into the body of the dropping plane.

"They fold forward," said Kleig quietly, "so that the speed of the plane in the take-off will snap them *backward* into position for flying!"

NO one spoke, because the explanation was so obvious.

Slowly the airplane went down to the surface of the sea, with scarcely a plume of spindrift leaping back after she had struck. She dropped to ten feet below the surface of the water, a hundred yards off the starboard beam of the *Stellar*, her blunt nose pointing squarely at the side of the doomed liner.

"Now," said Kleig hoarsely, "watch closely, for God's sake!"

The liner rose and fell slowly. Out of the nose of the plane, which had now become a tiny submarine, started a narrow tube of black, oddly like the sepia of a giant squid. Straight toward the side of the liner it went. Above the rail the Secret Agents could see the pictured form of Prester Kleig, hand upraised. The black streak reached the side of the *Stellar*.

It touched the metal plates, spreading upon impact, growing, enlarging, to right and left, upward and downward, and where it touched the *Stellar* the black of it seemed to erase that portion of the ship. In the slow motion every detail was apparent. At regular speed the blotting out of the *Stellar* would have been instantaneous.

Kleig saw himself rise slowly from the vanished rail, turning over and over, going down to the sea. He almost closed his eyes, bit his lips to keep back the cries of terror when he saw the others aboard the liner rise, turn over and over, and fly in all directions like jackstraws in a high wind.

THE ship was erased from beneath passengers and crew, and passengers and crew fell into the sea. Out of the depths, from all directions, came the starving denizens of the sea—starving because liners now were so few.

"That's enough of that, Professor," snapped Kleig. "Now jump ahead approximately eight hours, and see if you can pick up that aero-sub after it dropped me on the Jersey Coast."

The picture faded out quickly, the screaming of doomed human beings, already hours dead, called back to apparent living by the genius of Maniel died away, and for a space the screen was blank.

Then, the sea again, storm-tossed as before, shifting here and there as Maniel sought in the immensity of sea and sky for the thing he desired.

"Two hundred miles south by east of New York City," he droned. "There it is, gentlemen!"

They all saw it then, in full flight,

eight thousand feet above the surface of the Atlantic, traveling south by east at a dizzy rate of speed.

"Note," said Kleig, "that it keeps safely to the low altitudes, in order to escape the notice of regular air traffic."

No one answered.

The eyes of the Secret Agents were on that flashing, bulbous-bodied plane of the strange wings. It appeared to be heading directly for some objective which must be reached at top speed.

FOR fifteen minutes the flight continued. Then the plane tilted over and dived, and at an altitude still of three thousand feet, the wings slashed forward, clicking into their notches in the sides of the bulbous body, with a sound like the ratchets on subway turnstiles, and, holding their breath, the Secret Agents watched it plummet down to the sea. It was traveling with terrific speed when it struck, yet it entered the water with scarcely a splash.

Then, for the first time, an audible gasp, as that of one person, came from the lips of the Secret Agents. For now they could see the objective of the aero-sub. A monster shadow in the water, at a depth of five hundred feet. A shadow which, as Maniel manipulated his instruments, became a floating underwater fortress, ten times the size of any submarine known to the Americas.

Sporting like porpoises about this held-in-suspension fortress were myriads of other aero-subs, maneuvering by squadrons and flights, weaving in and out like schools of fish. The plane which had bourne Prester Kleig churned in between two of the formations, and vanished into the side of the motionless monster of the deep.

The striking of a deep sea bell, muted by tons and tons of water, sounded in the Secret Room.

"Don't turn it off, Maniel," said Kleig. "There's more yet!"

And there was, for the sound of the bell was a signal. The aero-subs, darting outward from the side of the floating fortress like fish darting out of seaweed, were plunging up toward the surface of the Atlantic. Breathlessly the Secret Agents watched them.

They broke water like flying fish, and their wings shot backward from their notches in the myriad bulbous bodies to click into place in flying position as the scores of aero-subs took the air above the invisible hiding places of the mother submarine.

AT eight thousand feet, the aero-subs swung into battle formation and, as though controlled by word of command, they maneuvered there like one vast machine of a central control—beautiful as the flight of swallows, deadly as anything that flew.

The Secret Agents swept the cold sweat from their brows, and sighs of terror escaped them all.

At that moment came the voice, loud in the Secret Room, which Kleig at least immediately recognized:

"Well, gentlemen, are you satisfied that resistance is futile?".

And Kleig whispered the name, over and over again.

"Moyen! Moyen!"

It was Prester Kleig, Master of the Secret Room, who was the first to regain control after the nerve-numbing question which, asked in far Madagascar, was heard by the Agents in the Secret Room.

"No!" he shouted. "No! No! Moyen, in the end we will beat you!"

Only silence answered, but deep in the heart of Prester Kleig sounded a burst of sardonic laughter—the laughter of Moyen, half-god of Asia. Then the voice again:

"The attack is beginning, gentlemen! Within an hour you will have further evidence of the might of Moyen!"

CHAPTER VI

Vanishing Ships

PRESTER KLEIG, ordered to Madagascar from the Secret Room, had been merely an operative, honored above others in that he had

been one of the few, at that time, ever to visit the Secret Room. Now, however, because he had walked closer to Moyen than anyone else, he assumed leadership almost by natural right, and the men who had once deferred to him took orders from him.

"Gentlemen," he snapped, while the last words of Moyen still hung in the air of the Secret Room, "we must fight Moyen from here. The best brains in the United Americas are gathered here, and if Moyen can be beaten—*if* he can be beaten— he will be beaten from the Secret Room!"

A sigh from the lips of Professor Maniel. The President of the United Americas nodded his head, as though he too mutely gave authority into the hands of Prester Kleig. The other Secret Agents shifted slightly, but said nothing.

"I have been away a year," said Kleig, "as you know, and many things have come into regular use since I left. Professor Maniel's machine for example, upon which he was working when I departed under orders. There will be further use for it in our struggle with Moyen. Professor, will you kindly range the ocean, beginning at once, and see how many of these monsters of Moyen we have to contend with?"

PROFESSOR MANIEL turned back to his instruments, which he fondled with gentle, loving hands.

"We have nothing with which to combat the attacking forces of Moyen," went on Kleig, "save antiquated airplanes, and such obsolete warships as are available. These will be mere fodder for the guns, or rays, or whatever it is that Moyen uses in his aero-subs. Thousands, perhaps millions, of human lives will be lost; but better this than that Moyen rule the West! Better this than that our women be given into the hands of this mob as spoils of war!"

From the Secret Agents a murmur of assent.

And then, that voice again, startling, clear, with the slightest suggestion of some Oriental accent, in the Secret Room.

"Do not depend too much, gentlemen," it said, "upon your antiquated warships! See, I am merciful, in that I do not allow you to send them against me loaded with men to be slaughtered or drowned! Professor Maniel, I would ask you to turn that plaything of yours and gaze upon the fleet of obsolete ships anchored in Hampton Roads! In passing, Professor, I venture to guess that the secret of how I am able to talk with you gentlemen, here in your Secret Room, is no secret at all to you. Now look!"

The Secret Agents gasped again, in consternation.

From the white lips of mouselike Maniel came mumbled words, even as his hands worked with lightning speed.

"His machine is simply a variation of my own. And, gentlemen, compatriots, with it he could as easily project himself, bodily, here into the room with us!"

SOMETHING like a suppressed scream from one of the men present. A cold hand of ice about the heart of Prester Kleig. But the words of Professor Maniel were limned on the retina of his brain in letters of fire. Suppose Moyen *were* to project himself into the Secret Room. . . .

But he would not. He was no fool, and even these Secret Agents, most of whom were old and no longer strong, would have torn him limb from limb. But those words of Maniel set whirling once more, and in a new direction, the thoughts of Prester Kleig.

"Mr. President, gentlemen. . . ." It was the voice of Professor Maniel.

All eyes turned again to the screen upon which the professor worked his miracles, which today were commonplaces, which yesterday had been undreamed of. Every Secret Agent recognized the outlines of Hampton Roads, with Norfolk and its towering buildings in the background, and the obsolete

warships riding silently at anchor in the roadstead.

For three years they had been there, while a procrastinating Cabinet, Congress and Senate had debated their permanent disposal. They represented millions of dollars in money, and were utterly worthless. Prester Kleig, looking at them now, could see them putting out to sea, loaded with brave-visaged men, volunteering to go to sure destruction to feed the rapacity of Moyen's hordes. Men going out to sea in tubs, singing. . . .

But these ships were silent. No plumes of smoke from their funnels. Like floating mausoleums, filled with dead hopes, shells of past and departed glories.

The beating of waves against their sides could plainly be heard. The anchor chains squeaked rustily in the hawse-holes. Wind sighed through regal, towering superstructures, and no man walked the decks of any one of them.

WITH bated breath the Secret Agents watched.

Why had Moyen bidden them turn their attention to these shells of erstwhile naval grandeur?

This time no gasps broke from the lips of the Secret Agents. Not even the sound of breathing could be heard. Just the sighing of wind through the superstructures of a hundred ships, the whispering of waves against rusted bulkheads.

Almost imperceptibly at first the towering dreadnought in the foreground began to move! Slowly, the water swirling about her, she backed away from her anchor, tightening the curve of the anchor chain! Water quivered about the point of the chain's contact with the waves!

Quickly the eyes of the Secret Agents swept along the street of ships. The same backward motion, of dragging against their anchor chains, was visible at the bow of each warship!

With not a soul aboard them, the ships were waking into strange and awesome life, dragging at their anchors, like hounds pulling at leashes to be free and away!

"How are they doing it?" It was almost a whisper from the President.

"Some electro-magnetic force, sir!" stated Prester Kleig. "Professor Blaine, that is your province! Please note what is happening, and advise us at once if you see how they are doing it!"

A grunt of affirmation from surly, obese Professor Blaine.

ALL eyes turned back again to the miracle of the moving ships. One by one, with crashes which echoed and re-echoed through the Secret Room, the anchor chains of the dreadnoughts parted. The ends of them swung from the prows of the warships, while the severed portions splashed into the Roads, and the waters hid them from view.

The great dreadnought in the foreground swung slowly about until her prow was pointed in the direction of the open sea, and though no sea was running, no smoke rose from her funnels, she got slowly, ponderously under way, and started out the Roads. Behind her, in formation, the other ships swung into line.

In a matter of seconds, faster than any of these vessels had ever traveled before, they were racing in column for the open Atlantic. And from the sound apparatus came wails and shrieks of terror, the lamentations of men and women frightened as they had never been frightened before.

The shores behind the moving column of ships was moment by moment growing blacker with people—a black sea of people, whose faces were white as chalk with terror.

But on, out to sea, moved the column of brave ships.

A new note entered into the picture, as from all sides airplanes of many makes swooped in, and swept back and forth over the moving ships, while hooded heads looked out of pits, and

faces of pilots were aghast at what they saw.

A GHOST column of ships, moving out to sea, speed increasing moment by moment unbelievably. Even now, five minutes after the first dreadnought had started seaward, the wake of each ship spread away on either hand in the two sides of a watery triangle whose walls were a dozen feet high—racing for the shores with all the sullen majesty of tidal waves.

The crowds gave back, and their screams rose into the air in a frightened roar of appalling sound.

Even now, so rapidly did the warships travel, many of the planes could throttle down, so that they flew directly above the heaving decks of the runaway warships.

"Get word to them!" cried Prester Kleig suddenly. "Get word to them that if they follow the ships out to sea not a pilot will escape alive!"

One of the Secret Agents rose and hurried from the Secret Room, traveling at top speed for the first of the many doors enroute to the broadcasting tower from which all the planes could be reached at once. Prester Kleig turned back to the magic screen of Maniel.

The warships, water thrown aside by the lifting thrust of their forefeet in mountains that raced landward with ever-increasing fury, were clearing the Roads and swinging south by east, heading into the wastes of the Atlantic. As they cleared the land, and open water for unnumbered miles lay ahead, the speed of the mighty ships increased to a point where they rode as high on the water as racing launches, and the creaking and groaning of their rusty bolts and spars were a continual paean of protest in the sound apparatus accompanying the showing of the miracle on the screen.

"They're heading straight for the spot where that super-submarine lies!" said the President, and no one answered him.

PRESTER KLEIG, watching, was racing over in his mind what he could recall of his country's armament. Warships were useless, as was being proved here before his eyes. But there still remained airplanes, in countless numbers, which could be diverted from ocean travel and from routine business, to battle this menace of Moyen.

But . . . .

He shuddered as he pictured in his mind's eye the meeting of his country's flower of flying manhood with the monsters of Moyen.

His eyes, as he thought, were watching the racing of those ocean greyhounds, out to sea. They were now out of sight of land, and still some of the planes followed them.

A half hour passed, and then . . . .

The American pilots, in obedience to the radio signals, turning back from this strange phenomenon of the ghost column of capital ships.

Simultaneously, out of the sky dead ahead, dropped the first flight of Moyens' aero-subs.

At the same moment the mysterious power which had dragged the ships to sea was withdrawn, and the warships, with no hands to guide them, swung whither they willed, and floated in as many directions as there were ships, under their forward momentum. There were a score of collisions, and some of the ships were in sinking condition even before the aero-subs began their labors.

THE remaining ships floated high out of the water, because they carried no ballast, and from all sides the aero-subs of Moyen settled to the task of destruction—destruction which was simply a warning of what was to come: Moyen's manner of proving to the Americas the fact that he was all-powerful.

"God, what fools!" cried Prester Kleig.

The rearmost of the American aviators had looked back, had seen the first of the aero-subs drop down among

the doomed ships. Instantly he turned out to sea again, signalling as he did so to the nearest other planes. And in spite of the radio warning a hundred planes answered that signal and swept back to investigate this new mystery.

"They're going to death!" groaned the President.

"Yes," said Kleig, softly, "but it saves us ordering others to death. Perhaps we may learn something of value as we watch them die!"

CHAPTER VII

Golden Oblivion

"THIS," said Prester Kleig, as coldly precise as a judge pronouncing sentence of death, "will precipitate the major engagement with Moyen's forces. The fools, to rush in like this, when they have been warned! But even so, they are magnificent!"

The pilots of the aero-subs must instantly have noticed the return of the American pilots, for some of the aero-subs which had dropped to the ocean's surface rose again almost instantly, and swept into battle formation above the drifting hulks of the warships.

The Americans were wary. They drew together like frightened chickens when a hawk hovers above them, and watched the activities of the aero-subs, every move of each one being at the same time visible and audible to the Secret Agents in the Capitol's Secret Room.

The aero-subs which had submerged singled out their particular prey among the floating ships, and the Secret Agents, trying to see how each separate act of destruction was accomplished, watched the aero-sub in the foreground, which happened to be concentrating on the dreadnought which had led the ghost-march of the warships out to sea.

THE aero-sub circled the swaying dreadnought as a shark circles a wreck, and through the walls of the aero-sub the watchers in the Secret Room could see the four-man crew of the thing. Grim faced men, men of the Orient they plainly were, coldly concentrating on the work in hand. Their faces were those of men who are merciless, even brutal, with neither heart nor compassion of any kind for weaker ones. One man maneuvered the aero-sub, while the other three concentrated on the apparatus in the nose of the hybrid vessel.

"See," spoke Prester Kleig again, "if you can tell what manner of ray they use, and how it is projected. That's your province, General Munson!"

From the particular Secret Agent named, who was expert for war in the membership of the Secret Room, came a short grunt of affirmation. A few murmured words.

"I'll be able to tell more about it when I see how they operate when they are flying. That black streak under water . . . well, I must see it out of the water, and then . . . ."

But here General Munson ended, for the aero-sub which they were especially watching had got into action against the dreadnought.

The aero-sub was motionless and submerged just off the port bow of the dreadnought. The three men inside the aero-sub were working swiftly and efficiently with the complicated but minute machinery in the nose of their transport.

"It can be controlled, then, this ray," said Munson, interrupting himself. "Watch!"

FROM the nose of the aero-sub leaped, like a streak of black lightning, that ebon agency of death. It struck the prow of the battleship—and the prow, as far aft as the well-deck, simply vanished from sight, disintegrated! It was as though it had never been, and for a second, so swiftly had it happened, the water of the ocean held the impression that portion of the warship had made—as an explosive leaves a crater in the soil of earth!

Then a drumming roar as the sea rushed in to claim its own. The roaring, as of a Niagara, as the waters claimed the ship, rushing down passageways into the hold, possessing the warship with all the invincible, speedy might of the sea.

Mingled with this roaring was the shivering, vibratory sound which Prester Kleig had experienced in his half-dream. The sound was so intense that it fairly rocked the Secret Room to its furthermost cranny.

For a second the dreadnought, wounded to death, seemed to shudder, to hesitate, then to move backward as though wincing from her death blow. It was the pound of the inrushing waters which did it. Then up came the stern of the mighty ship, as she started her last long plunge into the depths.

But attention had swung to another warship, on the starboard beam of which another aero-sub had taken up position. Again the ebon streak of death from her blunt nose, smashing in and through the warship, directly amidships, cutting her in twain as though the black streak had been a pair of shears, the warship a strip of tissue paper.

Up went the prow and the stern of this one, and together, the water separating the two parts as it rushed into the gap, the broken warship went down to its final resting place.

ABRUPTLY Professor Maniel swung back to the American planes which had come back to investigate the activities of the aero-subs, and on the screen, in the midst of the battle formation into which the pilots had swept so hurriedly, the Secret Agents could see the faces of those pilots . . . .

White as chalk with fear, mouths open in gasping unbelief. One man, a pale-faced youth, was the first to recover. He stared around at his compatriots, and plainly through the sound apparatus in the Secret Room came his swift radio signals.

"Attack! Who will follow me against these people?"

His signals were very plain. So, too, were the answers of the other pilots, and the heart of Prester Kleig swelled with pride as he listened to the answering signals—and counted them, discovered that every last pilot there present elected to stay with this youngster, to avenge their country for this contemptuous insult which had been put upon her by the rape of Hampton Roads.

Into swift formation they swept, and with these planes—all planes in use were required by franchise of operating companies to be equipped for the emergencies of war—swung into an echelon formation, the youthful pilot leading by mutual consent.

They swept at full speed toward the warships, four of which had by this time been sent to destruction—one of which had appeared to vanish utterly in the space of a single heartbeat, so quickly that for a second or two the shape of its bilge, the bulge of its keel, was visible in the face of the deep—and openly challenged the aero-subs.

MUZZLES of compressed air guns projected from the wing-tips of the planes. Buttons were pressed which elevated the muzzles of guns arranged to fire upward from either side the fighting pits, twin guns that were fired downward from the same central magazine—the only guns in use in the Americas which fired in opposite directions at the same time.

But for a few moments the aero-subs refused combat. Their speed was terrific, dazzling. They eluded the thrusts, the dives and plunges of the American ships as easily as a swallow eludes the dive of a buzzard.

It came to Prester Kleig, however, that the aero-subs were merely playing with the Americans; that when they elected to move, the planes would be blasted from the sky as easily as the warships were being erased from the surface of the Atlantic.

One by one, as methodically as machines, the aero-sub pilots blasted the warships into nothingness. They had their orders, and they went about their performance with a rigidity of discipline which astounded the Secret Agents. They had been ordered to destroy the warships, and they were doing that first—would go on to completion of this task, no matter how many American planes buzzed about their ears.

But one by one as the warships sank, the aero-subs which had either sunk or erased them made the surface and leaped into space with a snapping back of wings that was horribly businesslike as to sound, and climbed up to take part in the fight against the American planes, which must inevitably come.

THE last warship, cut squarely in two from stem to stern along her center, as though split thus by a bolt of lightning, fell apart like pieces of cake, and splashed down, sinking away while the spume of her disintegration rolled back from her fallen sides in white-crested waves.

"It exemplifies the policies of Moyen," said Prester Kleig, "for his conquest of the world is a conquest of destruction."

The last aero-sub took to the sky, and the Americans rushed into battle with fine disregard for what they knew must be certain death. They were not fools, exactly, and they had seen, but not understood, the manner in which those gallant old hounds of the sea had been erased from existence.

But in they went, plunging squarely into the heart of the aero-subs' leading formation, which formation consisted of three aero-subs, flying a wing and wing formation.

The young American signaled with upraised hand, and the American pilots made their first move. Every plane started rolling, at dazzling speed, on the axis of its fuselage, while bullets spewed from the guns that fired through the propellers.

Bullets smashed into the leading aero-subs, with no apparent effect, though for a second it seemed that the central aero-sub of the leading formation hesitated for a moment in flight.

Then, swift as had that black streak flashed from the nose of aero-subs submerged, a streak darted from the nose of the central aero-sub, and glistened in the sun like molten gold!

IT touched the youngster who had called for volunteers for his attack against this strange enemy. It touched his plane—and the plane vanished instantly, while for a fraction of a second the pilot was visible in his place, in the posture of sitting, hand on a row of buttons which did not exist, head forward slightly as he aimed guns that had vanished.

Then the pilot, still living, apparently unhurt, plunged down eight thousand feet to the sea. The water geysered up as he struck, then closed over the spot, and the gallant American youngster had become the first victim in battle of the monsters of Moyen.

Victim of a slender lancet of what seemed to be golden lightning.

"He could have killed the pilot aloft there," came quietly from Munson, "but he chose to pull his plane away from around him! Their control of the ray is miraculous!"

As though to confirm the statement of Munson, the leading aero-sub struck again, a second plane. The plane vanished, but from the spot where it had flown, not even a bit of metal or of man sufficiently large to be seen by the delicate recording instruments of Maniel dropped out of the sky.

The ray of gold was a ray of oblivion if the minions of Moyen willed.

CHAPTER VIII

Charmion

"PRESTER KLEIG," came suddenly into the Secret Room the voice of far distant Moyen, "you will at

once make a change in your rules regarding the admission of other than Secret Agents to the Secret Room. You will at once see that Charmion Kane, sister of your friend, is allowed to enter!"

"God Almighty!" A cry of agony from the lips of Prester Kleig. He had not forgotten Charmion, but simply had had to move so swiftly that he had put her out of his mind. For a year he had not seen her, and an hour or two more could not matter greatly.

"And her brother Carlos," went on the voice, "see that he, too, is admitted. I wish, for certain reasons, that Charmion come unharmed through the direct attack I am about to make against your country. I confess that, save for this ability to speak to you, I am unable to work any damage to the Secret Room, which is therefore the safest place for Charmion Kane! Carlos Kane is being spared because he is her brother!"

There was no mistaking the import of this sinister command from Moyen. He had singled out Charmion, the best beloved of Prester Kleig, for his attentions, and that he was sure of the success of his attack against the United Americas was proved by the calm assurance of his voice, and the fact that, concentrating on the attack as he must be, he still found time for a thought of Charmion Kane.

THE hand of ice which had seldom been absent from the heart of Kleig since he had first seen and heard the voice of Moyen gripped him anew. Blood pounded maddeningly in his temples. Cold sweat bathed his body.

But the rest of the Secret Agents, save to freeze into immobility when the hated voice spoke, gave no sign. They had worries of their own, for no instructions had been given that they bring their own loved ones into the sanctuary of the Secret Room.

As though answering the thoughts of the others, the hated voice spoke again.

"I regret that I cannot arrange for sanctuary for the loved ones of all of you, for you are gallant antagonists; why save the few, when the many must perish? For I know you will not surrender, however much I have proved to you that I am invincible. But Charmion Kane must be saved."

"God!" whispered Kleig. "God!"

Then spoke General Munson.

"I think this ray which the Moyenites use is a variation of the principle used in the intricate machinery of Professor Maniel, though how they render it visible I do not know. But it doesn't matter, and may be only a blind! You'll note that when the black streak, or the golden ray, strikes anything that thing instantly disintegrates. A certain pitch of resonance will break a pane of glass. It's a matter of vibration, solely, wherein the molecules composing any object animate or inanimate, are hurled in all directions instanteously.

"Professor Maniel's apparatus, the Vibration-Retarder, is able to recapture the vibrations, speeding outward endlessly through space, and to reconstruct, and *draw back* to visibility the objects destroyed by this visible vibratory ray, whatever it is. This problem, then, falls into the province of Professor Maniel!"

THROUGH the heart and soul of Prester Kleig there suddenly flowed a great surge of hope.

"General Munson, if you will operate the machinery of the Vibration-Retarder, I wish to talk with Professor Maniel!"

Instantly, efficiently, without a word in reply to the eager command of Prester Kleig, General Munson relieved Professor Maniel at the apparatus which Maniel called the Vibration-Retarder, his invention which he had combined with audible teleview to complete this visual miracle of the Secret Room. Professor Maniel stepped to where Prester Kleig was sitting.

Prester Kleig put fingers to his lips

for silence, and an expression of surprise crossed the wrinkled, dead-white face of the Professor.

Before Kleig could speak, however, there came a signal from somewhere outside the Secret Room, a signal which said that the doors were being opened and that a personage was coming. The Secret Agents looked at one another in surprise, for every man who had a right to be inside the Secret Room was already present.

"I know," said Kleig, his face a mask of terror. "It is Charmion and Carlos Kane! Moyen, the devil, has managed to make sure of obedience to his orders!"

The Secret Agents turned back to the screen, upon which the view of the first aerial brush of the American flyers with the minions of Moyen, in their aero-subs, was drawing to a terrible close.

For, as the aero-sub commanders had played with the warships, which had no human beings aboard them, so now did they play with the planes of the Americas.

ONE American flyer, startled into a frenzy by the fate of his fellows, put his helicopter into action, and leaped madly out of the midst of the battle. Instantly an aero-sub zoomed skyward after him. Again that golden streak of light from the nose of an aero-sub, and the helicopter vanes and the slender staff upon whose tip they whirled vanished, shorn short off above the vane-grooves in the top of the wing!

The plane dropped away, fluttering like a falling leaf for a moment, before the aviator started his three propellers again.

A cheer broke from the lips of Prester Kleig as he watched. The commander of that particular aero-sub, apparently contemptuous of this flyer who had tried to cut out of the fight, allowed him to fall away unmolested—and the American, driven berserk by the casual, contemptuous treatment accorded him by this strange enemy, zoomed the second his propellers whirred into top-speed action, and raced up the sky toward the belly of the aero-sub.

"If only the aero-sub has a blind spot!" cried Prester Kleig.

IN that instant a roaring crash sounded in the Secret Room as the American plane, going full speed, crashed, propellers foremost, into the belly of the aero-sub.

And the aero-sub, whose brothers had seemed until this moment invincible, did not escape the wrath of the American—though the American went into oblivion with it!

For, welded together, American plane and aero-sub started the eight thousand feet plunge downward to the sea!

"Watch!" shrieked Munson. "Watch!"

As the aero-sub and the plane plunged down through the formation of fighters, the aero-sub pilots saw it, and they fled in wild dismay and at top speed from their falling compatriot. Why? For a moment it was not apparent. And then it was.

For out of the body of the doomed aero-subs came sheets of golden flame! Not the flames of fire, but the golden sheen of that streak which the aero-subs had used against the American planes already out of the fight! The American flyer had crashed into the container, whatever it was, that harnessed the agency through which the minions of Moyen had destroyed the *Stellar*, and the battleships raped from Hampton Roads!

"It is liquid, then!" shrieked Munson.

And it seemed to be. For a second the golden mantle, strange, awe-inspiring, bathed and rendered invisible the aero-sub and the plane which had slain her. Then the golden flame vanished utterly, instantly—and in the air where it had been there was nothing! The aero-sub was gone, and the

plane whose mad charge had erased her.

"Her own death dealing agency destroyed her!" shrieked Munson. "And the other aero-subs cut away from the fight to save themselves, because they too carry death and destruction within them!"

THEN the inner door of the Secret Room opened and two people entered. One of them, a dazzling beauty with glorious black hair and the tread of a princess, a picture of perfection from jeweled sandals to coiffured hair, was Charmion Kane. Behind her came her brother, whose face was chalky white. But Charmion, as she crossed to Kleig and kissed him, while her eyes were luminous with love, held her head proudly high, imperious.

"I know," she said softly to Kleig, "and I am not afraid! I know you will prevent it!"

Kleig waved the two to chairs and turned again to Professor Maniel.

On a piece of paper he wrote swiftly, using a mode of shorthand known only to the Secret Agents.

"Professor," he wrote feverishly, "can you reverse the process used in your Vibration-Retarder? Tell me with your eyes, for Moyen may even know this writing, and I am sure he hears what we say here, may even be able to see us?"

Professor Maniel started and stared deeply into the eyes of Prester Kleig. His face grew thoughtful. He brushed his slender hand over the massive dome of his brow. Hope burned high in the heart of Prester Kleig.

THEN, despite Kleig's instructions to answer merely by the expression in his eyes, Professor Maniel leaned forward and wrote quickly on the piece of paper Kleig had used.

"Two hours!"

Nothing else, no explanations; but Prester Kleig knew. Maniel believed he could do it, but he needed two hours in which to perfect his theory and make it workable. Kleig knew that had he been able to do it in two years, or two decades, it still would have been in the nature of a miracle.

But two hours . . . .

And Moyen had said that he was preparing to attack at once.

In two hours Moyen, unless the Americas fought against him with every resource at their command, could depopulate half the Western World. Kleig looked back to the screen.

There was not a single American plane in the sky above the graveyard of those vanished warships. And the aero-subs, swift flying as the wind, were racing back to the mother ship, scores of miles away.

Munson worked with the Vibration-Retarder, the Sound-and-Vision devices, ranging the sea off the coast to either side of that huge, suspended fortress which was the mother submarine of the aero-subs.

Gasps of terror, though the sight was not unexpected, broke from the lips of every person in the Secret Room.

For super-monsters of Moyen were moving to the attack.

CHAPTER IX

Flowers of Martyrdom

FOR a minute the Secret Agents were appalled by the air of might of the deep-sea monsters of Moyen, brought bodily, almost into the Secret Room by the activities of General Munson at the Sound-and-Vision apparatus.

Off the coast, miles away, yet looming moment by moment larger, indicating the deceptively swift speed of the monsters, were scores of the great under-water fortresses, traveling toward the coast of the United Americas in a far-flung formation, each submarine separated from its neighbor to right and left by something like a hundred miles, easy cruising radius for the little aero-subs carried inside the monsters.

That each submarine did carry such spawn of Satan was plainly seen, for

as the great submarines moved landward, scores of aero-subs sported gleefully about the mother ships. There was no counting the number of them.

Two hours Maniel needed for his labors, which meant that for two hours the flower of the country's manhood must try to hold in check the mighty hordes of Moyen.

"Somewhere there," stated Prester Kleig, "in one or the other of those monsters, is Moyen himself. I know that since he wished Charmion saved for his attentions! Do your work with your apparatus, Munson, while I go out to the radio tower to broadcast an appeal for volunteers. Charmion—Carlos . . . . "

But Prester Kleig found that he could not continue. Not that it was necessary, for Charmion and Carlos knew what was in his mind. Charmion was a lady of vast intelligence, from whom life's little ironies had not been hidden—and Kane and Kleig had already discussed the activities of Moyen where women were concerned.

PRESTER KLEIG hurried to the Central Radio Tower, and as he passed through each of the many doors leading out to the roof of the new Capitol Building the guards at the doors left to form a guard for him, at this moment the most precious man in the country, because he knew best the terrible trials which faced her.

The country was in turmoil. It seemed almost impossible that a whole day had passed since Prester Kleig had returned and entered the Secret Room. In the meantime a fleet of battleships had been drawn by some mysterious agency out to sea from Hampton Roads, and a fleet of fighting planes which had followed the ghost-column outward had not returned.

News-gatherers had spread the stories, distorted and garbled, across the western continents, and throughout the western confederacy men, women and children lived in the throes of the greatest fear that had ever gripped them. Fear held them most because they could not give the cause of their fear a name—save one . . . .

Moyen . . . . And the name was on the lips of everyone, and frenzied women stilled their squalling babes with its mention.

No word yet from the Secret Room, but Prester Kleig had scarcely appeared from it than someone started the radio signal which informed the frenzied, waiting world of the west that information, exact if startling, would now be forthcoming.

In millions of homes, in thousands of high-flying planes, listeners tuned in at the clear-all hum.

PRESTER KLEIG wasted no time in preliminaries.

"Prester Kleig speaking. We are threatened by Moyen, with scores of monster submarines, each a mother ship for scores of aero-subs, combinations of airplanes and miniature submarines. They are moving up on our eastern coast, from some secret base which we have not yet located. They are equipped with death dealing instruments of which we have but the most fragmentary knowledge, and for two hours I must call upon all flyers to combat the menace; until the Secret Agents, especially Professor Maniel, have had opportunity to counteract the minions of Moyen.

"Flyers of the United Americas! In the name of our country I ask that volunteers gather on the eastern coast, each flyer proceeding at once to the nearest coast-landing, after dropping all passengers. Your commanders have already been named by your various organizations, as required by franchise, and orders for the movement of the entire winged armada will come from this station. However, the orders will simply be this: Hold Moyen's forces at bay for a period of two hours! And know that many of you go to certain death, and make your own decisions as to whether you shall volunteer!"

This ended, Prester Kleig, excitement mounting high, hurried back to the Secret Room.

Now the public knew, and as the American public is given to doing, it steadied down when it knew the worst. Fear of the unknown had changed the public into a myriad-souled beast gone berserk. Now that knowledge was exact men grew calm of face, determined, and women assumed the supporting role which down the ages has been that of brave women, mothers of men.

A PERIOD of silence for a time after Prester Kleig's pronouncement.

As he entered the first door leading into the Secret Room, Carlos Kane met and passed him with a smile.

"You called for winged volunteers, did you not, Kleig?" he asked quietly.

Kleig nodded. "You are going?" he said.

"Yes. It is my duty."

No other words were necessary, as the men shook hands, Prester Kleig going on to the Secret Room, Carlos Kane going out to join the mighty armada which must fight against the minions of Moyen.

The words of Prester Kleig were heard by the pilots of the sky-lanes. The passenger pits, equipped with self-opening parachutes which dropped jumpers in series of long falls in order to acquire swift but accurate and safe landing—they opened at intervals in long falls of two thousand feet, stayed the fall, then closed again, so that drops were almost continuous until the last four hundred feet—and pilots, swiftly making up their minds, dropped their passengers, banked their planes, and raced into the east.

ALL over the Americas pilots dropped their passengers and their loads if their franchises called for the carrying of freight, and banked about to take part in the first skirmish with the Moyenites.

Dropping figures almost darkened the sky as passengers plunged downward after the startling signal from Washington. Flowers, which were the umbrellas of chutes, opened and closed like breathing winged orchids, letting their burdens safely to earth.

And clouds and fleets of airplanes came in from all directions to land, in rows and rows which were endless, wing and wing, along the eastern coast.

Prester Kleig had scarcely entered the Secret Room than the hated voice of Moyen again broke upon the ears of the machinelike Secret Agents.

"This is madness, gentlemen! My people will annihilate yours!"

But, since time for speech had passed, not one of the Secret Agents made answer or paid the slightest heed to the warning, though deep in the heart of each and every one was the belief that Molen spoke no more than the truth.

Too, there was a growing respect for the half-god of Asia, in that he was good enough to warn them of the holocaust which faced their country.

By hundreds and thousands, wing and wing, airplanes dropped to the Atlantic coast at the closest point of contact, when the signal reached them. At high altitudes, planes crossing the Atlantic turned back and returned at top speed, dropping their passengers as soon as over land. That Moyen made no move to prevent the return of flyers out over the ocean, and now coming back, was an ominous circumstance.

It seemed to show that he held the American flyers, all of them, in utter contempt.

PRESTER KLEIG regarded the time. It had been half an hour since Moyen had spoken of attack, half an hour since the monsters of the deep had started the inexorable move toward land. On the screen the submarines were bulking larger and larger as the moments fled, until it seemed to the Secret Agents that the great composite shadow of them already was sweeping inland from the coast.

As the coast came close ahead of the monster subs the little aero-subs, to the surprise of the Secret Agents, all vanished into their respective mother ships.

"But they have to use them," groaned Munson. "For their submarines are useless in frontal attack against our shores!"

"I am not so sure of that," said Prester Kleig. "For I have a suspicion that those submarines have tractors under their keels, and that they can come out on land! If this is so the monsters can, guarded by armour-plate, penetrate to the very heart of our most populated areas before their aero-subs are released."

None of the Secret Agents as yet had stopped to ponder how the monsters had reached their positions, and why Moyen was attacking from the east, when the Pacific side of the continents would have appeared to be the obvious point of attack, and would have obviated the necessity of long, secret undersea journeys wherein discovery prematurely must have been one of the many worries of the submarine commanders.

The mere fact of the presence of the monsters was enough. What had preceded their presence was unimportant, save that their presence, and their near approach to the shore undetected, further proved the executive and planning genius of Moyen.

Two miles, on an average, off the eastern coast the submarines laid their eggs—the aero-subs, which darted from the sides of the mother ships in flights and squadrons, made the surface, and leaped into the sky.

Five minutes later and the signal went forth to the phalanx of the volunteers.

"Take off! Fly east and engage the enemy, and hold him in check, and the God of our fathers go with you!"

One hour had passed since Moyen's ultimatum when the first vanguard of the American flyers, obeying the peremptory signal, took the air and darted eastward to meet the winged death-harbingers of Moyen.

CHAPTER X

"They Shall Not Pass!"

PRESTER KLEIG'S heartfelt desire, as the American flyers closed with the first of the aero-subs, was to go out with them and aid them in the attack against the Moyenites. But he knew, and it was a tacit thing, that he best served his country from the safe haven of the Secret Room.

As he watched the scenes unfold on the screen of Maniel's genius, with occasional glances at the somewhat mysterious but profound and concentrated labors of Maniel, Charmion Kane rose from her place and came to his side.

Wide-eyed as she watched the joining of battle, she stood there, her tiny hand encased in the tense one of Prester Kleig.

"You would like to be out there," she murmured. "I know it! But your country needs you here—and I have already given Carlos!"

Prester Kleig tightened his grip on her hand.

THERE was deep, silent understanding between these two, and Prester Kleig, in fighting against the Moyenites, realized, even above his realization that his labors were primarily for the benefit of his country, that he really matched wits with Moyen for the sake of Charmion. Had anyone asked him whether he would have sacrificed her for the benefit of his country, it would have been a difficult question to answer.

He was glad that the question was never asked.

"Yes, beloved," he whispered, "I would like to be out there, but the greatest need for me is here."

But even so he felt as though he was betraying those intrepid flyers he was sending to sure death. Yet they had volunteered, and it was the only way.

Maniel, a gnomelike little man with

a Titan's brain, labored with his calculations, made swiftly concrete his theories, while at the Sound-and-Vision apparatus excitable General Munson ranged the aerial battlefield to see how the tide of battle ebbed and flowed.

That neither side would either ask or give quarter was instantly apparent, for they rushed head-on to meet each other, those vast opposing winged armadas, at top speed, and not a single individual swerved from his course, though at least the Americans knew that death rode the skyways ahead.

Then . . . .

The battle was joined. Moyen's forces were superior in armament. Their sky-steeds were faster, more readily maneuverable, though the flying forces of the Americas in the last five years had made vast strides in aviation. But what the Americans lacked in power they made up for in fearless courage.

THE plan of battle seemed automatically to work itself out.

The first vanguard of American planes came into contact with the forces of Moyen, and from the noses of countless aero-subs spurted that golden streak which the Secret Agents knew and dreaded.

The first flight of planes, stretching from horizon to horizon, vanished from the sky with that dreadful surety which had marked the passing of the *Stellar*, and such of those warships as had felt the full force of the visible ray.

From General Munson rose a groan of anguish. Those convertible fighting planes had been the pride of the heart of the old warrior. To do him credit, however, it was the wanton, so terribly inevitable destruction of the flyers themselves which affected him. It was so final, so absolute—and so utterly impossible to combat.

"Wait!" snapped Prester Kleig.

For the intrepid flyers behind that vanguard which had vanished had witnessed the wholesale disintegration of the leading element of the vast armada, and the pilots realized on the instant that no headlong rush into the very noses of the aero-subs would avail anything.

The vast American formation broke into a mad maelstrom of whirling, darting, diving planes. Every third plane plummetted downward, every second one climbed, and the remaining ships, even in the face of what had happened to the vanished first flight, held steadily to the front.

In this mad, seemingly meaningless formation, they closed on the aero-subs. Without having seen the fight, the Americans were aping the action of that one nameless flyer who had charged the aero-sub that had been destroyed.

KLEIG remembered. A score of ships had been destroyed utterly above the graveyard of dreadnoughts, yet only one aero-sub, and that quite by chance, had been marked off in the casualty column.

Death rode the heavens as the American flyers went into action. For head-on fights, flyers went in at top speed, their planes whirling on the axes of fuselages, all guns going. Planes were armored against their own bullets, and they were not under the necessity of watching to see that they did not slay their own friends.

Even so, bullets were rather ineffective against the aero-subs, whose apparently flimsy, almost transparent outer covering diverted the bullets with amazing ease.

A whirling maelstrom of ships. The monsters of Moyden had drawn first blood, if the expression may be used in an action where no blood at all was drawn, but machines and men simply erased from existence.

Hundreds of planes already gone when the second flight of ships clashed with the aero-subs. Yellow streaks of death flashed from aero-sub nostrils, but even as aero-sub operators got their

into motion the American flyers in head-on charge rolled, dived or zoomed, and kept their guns going.

High above the first flight of aero-subs, behind which another flight was winging swiftly into action, American flyers tilted the noses of their planes over and dived under full power—to mete death by suicide, though none knew it there at the moment.

THESE aero-subs could not be driven from the sky by usual means, and could destroy American ships even before those planes could come to handgrips; but they, the flyers plainly believed, could be crashed out of the sky and so, never guessing what besides death in resulting crashes they faced, the flyers above the aero-subs, even as aero-subs in rear flashed in to prevent, dived down straight at the backs of the aero-subs.

In a hundred places the dives of the Americans worked successfully, and American planes crashed full and true, full power on, into the backs of the "flying fish." In some aero-subs the container of the Moyen-dealing agency apparently remained untouched, and airplanes and aero-subs, welded together, plunged down the invisible skylanes into the sea.

Under water, some of the aero-subs were seen to keep in motion, limping toward the nearest mother submarines.

"I hope," said Prester Kleig, "the American flyers in such cases are already dead, for Moyen will be a maniac in his tortures. Munson, do you hurriedly examine the mother-subs and see if you can locate Moyen."

HOWEVER, only a scattered aero-sub here and there went down without the strange substance of the yellow ray being released. In most cases, upon the contact of plane with aero-sub, the aero-subs and planes were instantly blotted from view by the yellow, golden flames from the heart of the winged harbingers of Moyen.

Golden flames, blinding in their brightness, dropping down, mere shapeless blotches, then fading out to nothingness in a matter of seconds—with aero-sub and airplane totally erased from action and from existence.

The American flyers saw and knew now the manner of death they faced. Yet all along the battle front not an American tried to evade the issue and draw out of the fight. A sublime, inspiring exhibition of mass courage which had not been witnessed down the years since that general engagement which men of the time had called the Great War.

Prester Kleig turned to look at Maniel. Drops of perspiration bathed the cheeks of the master scientist, but his eyes were glowing like coals of fire. His face was set in a white mask of concentration, and Prester Kleig knew that Maniel would find the answer to the thing he sought if such answer could be found.

Would the American flyers be able to hold off the minions of Moyen until Maniel was ready? The fight out there above the waters was a terrible thing, and the Americans fought and died like men inspired, yet inexorably the winged armada of Moyen, preceded by those licking golden tongues, was moving landward.

"Great God!" cried Munson. "Look!"

THERE was really no need for the order, for every Secret Agent saw as soon as did Munson. Under the sea, just off the coast, the mother-subs had touched their blunt nose against the upward shelving of the sea bottom—had touched bottom, and were slowly but surely following the underwater curve of the land, up toward the surface, like unbelievable antediluvian monsters out of some nightmare.

"Yes," said Kleig quietly, "those monsters of Moyen can move on land, and the aero-subs can operate from them as easily on land as under water."

Kleig regarded the time, whirled to look at Professor Maniel.

One hour and forty minutes had

passed since Maniel had begged for two hours in which to prepare some mode of effectively combatting the might of Moyen. Twenty minutes to go; yet the mother-subs would be ashore, dragging their sweating, monstrous sides out of the deep, within ten minutes!

Ten minutes ashore and there was no guessing the havoc they could cause to the United Americas!

"Hurry, Maniel! Hurry! Hurry!" said Prester Kleig.

But he spoke the words to himself, though even had he spoken them aloud Maniel would not have heard. For Maniel, for two hours, had closed his mind to everything that transpired outside his own thoughts, devoted to foiling the power of Moyen.

"I've found him!" snapped Munson.

HE pointed with a shaking forefinger to one of the mother-subs crawling up the slant of the ocean bed, twisted one of the little nubs of the Sound-and-Vision apparatus, and the angelic face and Satanic eyes, the twisted body, of Moyen came into view.

The face was calm with dreadful purpose, and Moyen stood in the heart of one of his monsters, his eyes turned toward the land. With a gasp of terror, dreadfully afraid for the first time, Prester Kleig turned and looked into the eyes of Charmion. . . .

"No," she said. "It will never happen. I have faith in you!"

There were still ten minutes of the two hours left when the mother-subs broke water and started crawling inland, swiftly, surely, without faltering in the slightest as they changed their element from water to land.

As though their appearance had been the signal, the aero-subs in action against the first line of American planes broke out of the one-sided fight and dived for their mother ships, while a mere handful of the American planes started back for home to prepare anew to continue the struggle.

Prester Kleig gave the signal to the second monster armada which had remained in reserve.

"Do everything in your power to halt the march of Moyen's amphibians!"

Ten minutes to go, and Professor Maniel still labored like a Titan.

CHAPTER XI

Caucasia Falls Silent

AS the scores of amphibian monsters came lumbering forth upon dry land it became instantly apparent why the aero-subs had returned to the mother ships. For a few moments, out of the water, the amphibians were almost helpless, with practically no way of attack or defense — as helpless as huge turtles turned legs up.

But as each aero-sub entered its proper slot in the side of the mother amphibian, it was turned about and the nose thrust back into the opening, which closed down to fit tightly about the nose of the aero-sub, so that those flame-breathing monsters protruded from the sides of the amphibians in many places — transforming the amphibians into monsters with hundreds of golden, licking tongues!

As, with each and every aero-sub in place, the amphibians started moving inland, Professor Maniel made his first move. With the tiny apparatus upon which he had been working, he stepped to the table before the Sound-and-Vision apparatus and spoke softly to his compatriots.

"Gentlemen," he said, "I have finished, and it will work effectively!"

Though Maniel spoke softly, it was plain to be seen that he was proud of his accomplishment, which remained only to be attached to start performance.

A matter of seconds. . . .

Yet during those seconds was the real might, the real power for utter devastation, of Moyen fully exposed!

THE amphibians got under way as the airplanes of the Americas swept into the fight.

From the sides of the monsters licked out those golden tongues of flame—and from the front:

Half a dozen amphibians slipped into New York from the harbor side and started into the heart of the city. And between the time when Maniel had said he was ready and the moment when he made his first active move against Moyen, a half-dozen skyscrapers vanished into nothingness, the spots where they had stood swept as clear of debris as though the land had never been reclaimed from Nature!

None was ever destined to know how many lives were lost in that first attack of the monsters of the golden, myriad tongues; but the monsters struck in the midst of a working day when the skyscrapers were filled with office workers.

And resolve struck deep into the hearts of the Secret Agents: if Moyen were turned back, he must be made to pay for the slaughter.

A matter of seconds. . . .

THEN a moment of deathly silence as Munson gave way at the screen for the gnomelike little Professor Maniel.

"Now, gentlemen!" snapped Maniel. "If my theory is correct," manipulating instruments with lightning speed as he talked, "the reversion of the principal of my Vibration-Retarder—which captures vibrations speeding outward from the earth and transforms them once again into sound and pictures audible and visible to the human ear—this application will disintegrate the monsters as our boats and planes were disintegrated!

"In this I have been even been compelled to manipulate in the matter of time! I must not only defeat and annihilate the minions of Moyen, but must work from a mathematical absurdity, so that at the moment of impact that moment itself must become part of the past, sufficiently remote to remove the monsters at such distance from the earth that not even the mighty brains of Moyen can return them!"

The whirring, gentle as the whirring of doves' wings. In the center of the picture on the screen were those half-dozen amphibians laying waste Manhattan. Maniel set his intricate, delicate machinery into motion.

Instantly the amphibians there seemed to become misty, shadowy, and to lift out of Manhattan up above the roof-tops of skyscrapers still remaining, nebulous and wraithlike as ghost-shrouds—yet swinging outward from the earth with speed almost too swift for the eye to detect.

But where the amphibians had rested there stood, reclined—in all sorts of postures, surprising and even a bit ridiculous—the men of Moyen who had operated the monsters of Moyen!

FROM the Central Radio tower went forth a mighty voice of command to the planes which had been engaging the aero-subs off the coast.

"Slay! Slay!"

Down flashed the planes of the Americas, and their guns were blazing, inaudibly, but none the less deadly of aim and of purpose, straight into the midst of the men of Moyen who had thus been left marooned and almost helpless with the vanishing of their amphibians.

And, noting how they fell in strangled, huddled heaps before the vengeful fire of the American planes, the Secret Agents sighed, and Maniel, his face alight with the pride of accomplishment, switched to another point along the coast.

And as a new group of the monsters of Moyen came into view, and Maniel bent to his labors afresh, the hated voice of the master mobster broke once more in the Secret Room.

"Enough, Kleig! Enough! We will surrender to save lives! I stipulate only that my own life be spared!"

To which Prester Kleig made instant reply.

"Did you offer us choice of surrender? Did you spare the lives of our people which, with your control of your

golden rays, you could easily have done? No! Nor will we spare lives, least of all the life of Moyen!"

The whirring again, as of the whirring of doves' wings. More metal monsters, even as golden tongues spewed forth from their many sides, vanished from view, leaping skyward, while the operators of them were left to the mercies of the remaining airmen of the Americans.

VOICELESSLY the word went forth:

"Slay! Slay!"

It was Charmion who begged for mercy for the vanquished as, one by one, as surely as fate, the monsters with their contained aero-subs were blotted out, leaving pilots and operators behind them. Down upon these dropped the airmen of the West, slaying without mercy. . . .

"Please, lover!" Charmion whispered. "Spare them!"

"Even. . . ?" he began, thinking of Moyen, who would have taken Charmion. He felt her shudder as she read his mind, understood what he would have asked.

"There he is!" came softly from Munson.

An amphibian had just been disintegrated, had just climbed mistily, swiftly, into invisibility in the skies. And there in the midst of the conquerors left behind, his angel's face set in a moody mask, his pale eyes awful with fear, his misshapen body sagging, terrible in its realization of failure, was Moyen!

Even as Kleig prepared to give the mercy signal, a plane dived down on the group about Moyen, and the Secret Agents could see the hand of the pilot lifted high, as though he signaled.

The plane was a Mayther! The pilot was Carlos Kane!

JUST as Kane went into action, and the noiseless bullets from his ship crashed into that twisted body, causing it to jump and twitch with the might of them, Prester Kleig gave the signal.

Even as the figure of Moyen crashed to the soil and the man's soul quitted its mortal casement, Kleig commanded:

"Spare all who surrender! Make them prisoners, to be used to repair the damage they have done to our country! Guards will be instantly placed over the amphibians and the aero-subs—for the day may come when we shall need to know their secrets!"

And, as men, hands lifted high in token of surrender, quitted the now motionless amphibians, and flyers dropped down to make them prisoners, Maniel sighed, pressed various buttons on his apparatus, and the mad scene of carnage they had witnessed for hours faded slowly out, and darkness and silence filled the Secret Room.

But darkness is the joy of lovers, and in the midst of silence that was almost appalling by contrast, Kleig and Charmion were received into each other's arms.

Everyone Is Invited

To "Come Over in

'THE READERS' CORNER'"!

Vampires of Venus

By Anthony Pelcher

He seized a short knife and threw himself forward.

IT was as if someone had thrown a bomb into a Quaker meeting, when adventure suddenly began to crowd itself into the life of the studious and methodical Leslie Larner, professor of entomology.

Fame had been his since early manhood, when he began to distinguish himself in several sciences, but the adventure and thrills he had longed for had always fallen to the lot of others.

Leslie Larner, an entomologist borrowed from the Earth, pits himself against the night-flying vampires that are ravaging the inhabitants of Venus.

His father, a college professor, had left him a good working brain and nothing else. Later his mother died and he was left with no relatives in the world, so far as he knew. So he gave his life over to study and hard work.

Still youthful at twenty-five, he was

hoping that fate would "give him a break." It did.

He was in charge of a Government department having to do with Oriental beetles, Hessian flies, boll weevils and such, and it seemed his life had been just one bug after another. He took creeping, crawling things seriously and believed that, unless curbed, insects would some day crowd man off the earth. He sounded an alarm, but humanity was not disturbed. So Leslie Larner fell back on his microscope and concerned himself with saving cotton, wheat and other crops. His only diversion was fishing for the elusive rainbow trout.

He managed to spend a month each year in the Colorado Rockies angling for speckled beauties.

Larner was anything but a clock-watcher, but on a certain bright day in June he was seated in his laboratory doing just that.

"Just five minutes to go," he mused.

It was just 4:25 P. M. He had finished his work, put his affairs in order, and in five minutes would be free to leave on a much needed and well earned vacation. His bags were packed and at the station. His fishing tackle, the pride of his young life, was neatly rolled in oiled silk and stood near at hand.

"I'll just fill my calabash, take one more quiet smoke, and then for the mountains and freedom," he told himself. He settled back with his feet on his desk. He half closed his eyes in solid comfort. Then the bomb fell and exploded.

B-R-R-R-R!

The buzzer on his desk buzzed and his feet came off the desk and hit the floor with a thud. His eyes popped open and the calabash was immediately laid aside.

That buzzer usually meant business, and it would be his usual luck to have trouble crash in on him just as he was on the edge of a rainbow trout paradise.

A messenger was ushered into the room by an assistant. The boy handed him an envelope, said, "No answer," and departed.

Larner tore open the envelope lazily. He read and then re-read its contents, while a look of puzzled surprise disturbed his usually placid countenance. He spread the sheet of paper out on his desk, and for the tenth time he read:

> Confidential.
>
> Memorize this address and destroy this paper:
>
> Tula Bela, 1726 88th Street, West, City of Hesper, Republic of Pana, Planet Venus.
>
> Will meet you in the Frying Pan.

That was all. It was enough. Larner lost his temper. He crumpled the paper and tossed it in the waste basket. He was not given to profanity, but he could say "Judas Priest" in a way that sizzled.

"Judas Priest!" he spluttered. "Anyone who would send a man a crazy bunch of nonsense like that, at a time like this, ought to be snuffed out like a beetle!

"'Meet you in the Frying Pan,'" he quoted. Then he happened to recall something. "By golly, there is a fishing district in Colorado known as the Frying Pan. That's not so crazy, but the planet Venus part surely is cuckoo."

He fished the paper out of the waste basket, found the envelope, placed the strange message within and put it in his inside coat pocket. Then he seized his suitcase and fishing tackle, and, rushing out, hailed a taxi. Not long after he was on his way west by plane.

AS the country unrolled under him he retrieved the strange note from his pocket. He read it again and again. Then he examined the envelope. It was an ordinary one of good quality, designed for business rather than social usage. The note paper appeared

quite different. It was unruled, pure white, and of a texture which might be described as pebbly. It was strongly made, and of a nature unlike any paper Larner had ever seen before. It appeared to have been made from a fiber rather than a pulp.

"Wonder who wrote it?" Larner asked himself. "It is beautiful handwriting, masculine yet artistic. Wonder where he got the Frying Pan idea? At any rate, I'm not going to the Frying Pan this year—I'm camping on Tennessee Creek, in Lake County, Colorado. The country there is more beautiful and restful.

"But this street address on the planet Venus. Seems to me I read somewhere that Marconi had received mysterious signals that he believed came from the planet Venus. Hesper, Hesper . . . it sounds familiar, somehow. Wonder if there could be anything to it?"

Something impelled him to follow out the instructions in the note. He spent the next few hours repeating the address over and over again. When he was satisfied that he had memorized it thoroughly, he tore the strange paper into bits and sent it fluttering earthward like a tiny snowstorm.

Larner was not a gullible individual, but neither was he unimaginative. He was scientist enough to know that "the impossibilities of to-day are the accomplishments of to-morrow." So while not convinced that the note was a serious communication, still his mind was open.

The weird address insisted on creeping into his mind and driving out other thoughts, even those of his speckled playfellows, the rainbow trout.

"I've a notion to change my plans and go from Denver to the Frying Pan," he cogitated. Then he thought, "No, I won't take it that seriously."

ANYONE who knows the Colorado Rockies knows paradise. There is no more beautiful country on the globe. Lake County, where Larner had chosen his fishing grounds, has as its seat the old mining camp of Leadville. It has been visited and settled more for its gold mines than the golden glow of its sunsets above the clouds, but the gold of the sunsets is eternal, while the gold of the mines is fading quickly away.

Leadville, with its 5,000 inhabitants, nestles above the clouds, at an altitude of more than 10,000 feet. Mount Massive with its three peaks lies back of the town in panorama and rises to a height of some 14,400 feet. In the rugged mountains thereabouts are hundreds of lakes fed by wild streams and bubbling crystal springs. All these lakes are above the clouds.

Winter sees the whole picture decorated with bizarre snowdrifts from twenty to forty feet deep, but spring comes early. The beautiful columbines and crocuses bloom before the snow is all off the ground in the valleys. The lands up to 12,000 feet altitude are carpeted with a light green grass and moss. Giant pines and dainty aspens, with their silvery bark and pinkish leaves blossom forth and whisper, while the eternal snows still linger in the higher rocky cliffs and peaks above.

Indian-paint blooms its blood red in contrast to the milder colorings. Blackbirds and bluebirds chatter and chipmunks chirp. The gold so hard to find in the mines glares from the skies. The hills cuddle in banks of snowy clouds, and above all a pure clear blue sky sweeps. The lakes and streams abound with rainbow trout, the gamest of any fresh water fish. It is indeed a paradise for either poet or sportsman.

In any direction near to Leadville a man can find Heaven and recreation and rest.

Finding himself on Harrison Avenue, the main street of the county seat, Larner, after renewing some old acquaintanceships, started west in a flivver for Tennessee Creek. The

flivver is a modern adjustment. Until a few years ago the only means of traversing these same hills was by patient, sure-footed donkeys, which carried the pack while the wayfarer walked along beside.

THE first day's fishing was good. Trout seemed to greet him cheerily and sprang eagerly to the fray. They bit at any sort of silken fly he cast.

The site chosen by Larner for his camp was in a mossy clearing separated from the stream by a fringe of willows along the creek. Then came a border of aspens backed by a forest of silver-tipped firs.

It was ideal and his eyes swept the scene with satisfaction. Then he began whittling bacon to grease his pan for frying trout over the open fire.

Suddenly he heard a rustle in the aspens, and, looking up, beheld a picture which made his eyes bulge. A man and a woman, garbed seemingly in the costumes of another world, walked toward him. Neither were more than five feet tall but were physically perfect, and marvelously pleasing to the eye. There was little difference in their dress.

Both wore helmets studded with what Larner believed to be sapphires. He learned later they were diamonds. Their clothing consisted of tight trouserlike garments surmounted by tunics of some white pelt resembling chamois, save for color. A belt studded with precious stones encircled their waists. Artistic laced sandals graced their small firm feet.

Their skin was a pinkish white. Their every feature was perfection plus, and their bodies curved just enough wherever a curve should be. The woman was daintier and more fully developed, and her features were even more finely chiseled than the man. Otherwise it would have been difficult to distinguish their sex.

Larner took in these details subconsciously, for he was awed beyond expression. All he could do was to stand seemingly frozen, half bent over the campfire with his frying pan in his hand.

THE man spoke.

"I hope we did not startle you," he said. "I thought my note would partly prepare you for this meeting. We expected to find you in the Frying Pan district. When you did not appear there we tuned our radio locator to your heart beats and in that way located you here. It was hardly a second's space-flying time from where we were."

Larner said nothing. He could only stand and gape.

"I do not wonder that you are surprised," said the strange little man. "I will explain that I am Nern Bela, of the City of Hesper, on the planet Venus. This is my sister Tula. We greet you in the interest of the Republic of Pana, which embraces all of the planet you know as Venus."

When Larner recovered his breath, he lost his temper.

"I don't know what circus you escaped from, but I crave solitude and I have no time to be bothered with fairy tales," he said with brutal brusqueness.

Expressions of hurt surprise swept the countenances of his visitors.

The man spoke again:

"We are just what we assert we are, and our finding you was made necessary by a condition which grieves the souls of all the 900,000,000 inhabitants of Venus. We have come to plead with you to come with us and use your scientific knowledge to thwart a scourge which threatens the lives of millions of people."

There was a quiet dignity about the man and an air of pride about the woman which made Larner stop and think, or try to. He rubbed his hand over his brow and looked questioningly at the pair.

"If you are what you say you are, how did you get here?" he asked.

"We came in a targo, a space-flying ship, capable of doing 426,000 miles an hour. This is just 1200 times as fast as 355 miles an hour, the highest speed known on earth. Come with us and we will show you our ship." They looked at him appealingly, and both smiled a smile of wistful friendliness.

Larner, without a word, threw down his frying pan and followed them through the aspens. The brother and sister walking ahead of him gave his eyes a treat. He surveyed the perfect form of the girl. Her perfection was beyond his ken.

"They certainly are not of this world," he mused.

A FEW hundred yards farther on there was a beach of pebbles, where the stream had changed its course. On this plot sat a gigantic spherical machine of a glasslike material. It was about 300 feet in diameter and it was tapered on two sides into tees which Larner rightly took to be lights.

"This is a targo, our type of space-flyer," said Nern Bela. "It is capable of making two trips a year between Venus and the earth. We have visited this planet often, always landing in some mountain or jungle fastness as heretofore we did not desire earth-dwellers to know of our presence."

"Why not?" asked Larner, his mouth agape and his eyes protruding. His mind was so full of questions that he fairly blurted his first one.

"Because," said Bela, slowly and frankly, "because our race knows no sickness and we feared contagion, as your race has not yet learned to control its being."

"Oh," said Larner thoughtfully. He realized that humans of the earth, whom he had always regarded as God's most perfect beings, were not so perfect after all.

"How do you people control your being, as you express it?" he asked.

"It is simple," was the reply. "For ninety centuries we have ceased to breed imperfection, crime and disease. We deprived no one of the pleasures of life, but only the most perfect mental and physical specimens of our people cared to have children. In other words, while we make no claim to controlling our sex habits, we do control results."

"Oh," said Larner again.

Nern Bela led the way to a door which opened into the side of the space-flyer near its base. "We have a crew of four men and four women," he said. "They handle the entire ship, with my sister and I in command, making six souls aboard in all."

"Why men and women?" thought Larner.

As if in answer to his thought Bela said:

"On the earth the two sexes have struggled for sex supremacy. This has thrown your civilization out of balance. On Venus we have struggled for sex equality and have accomplished it. This is a perfect balance. Man and women engage in all endeavor and share all favors and rewards alike.

"In war, too?" asked Larner.

"There has not been war on Venus for 600,000 years," said Bela. "There is only the one nation, and the people all live in perfect accord. Our only trouble in centuries is a dire peril which now threatens our people, and it is of this that I wish to talk to you more at length."

THEY were standing close to the targo. Larner was struck by the peculiar material of which it was constructed. There was a question in his eyes, and Nern Bela answered it:

"The metal is duranium; it is metalized quartz. It is frictionless, conducts no current or ray except repulsion and attraction ray NTR69X6 by which it is propelled. It is practically transparent, lighter than air and harder than a diamond. It is cast in moulds after being melted or, rather, fused.

"We use cold light which we pro-

duce by forcing oxygen through air tubes into a vat filled with the fat of a deep sea fish resembling your whale. You are aware, of course, that that is exactly how cold light is produced by the firefly, except for the fact that the firefly uses his own fat."

Larner was positively fascinated. He smoothed the metal of the turgo in appreciation of its marvelous construction, but he longed most to see the curious light giving mechanism, for this was closer to his own line of entomology. He had always believed that the light giving organs of fireflys and deep-sea fishes could be reproduced mechanically.

The interior of the ship resembled in a vague way that of an ocean liner. It was controlled by an instrument board at which a man and a girl sat. They did not raise their heads as the three people entered.

When called by Bela and his sister, who seemed to give commands in unison, the crew assembled and were presented to the visitor.

"Earth-dwellers are not the curiosity to us that we seem to be to you," said Tula Bela, speaking for the first time and smiling sweetly.

Larner was too engrossed to note the remark further than to nod his head. He was lost in contemplation of these strange people, all garbed exactly alike and all surpassingly lovely to look upon.

AN odor of food wafted from the galley, and Larner remembered he was hungry, with the hunger of health. He had swung his basket of fish over his shoulder when he left his campfire, and Tula took it from him.

"Would you like to have our chef prepare them for you?" she said, as she caught his hungry glance at his day's catch. This time Larner answered her.

"If you will pardon me," he said awkwardly. "Really I am famished."

"You will not miss your fish dinner," said the girl.

"I believe there is enough for all of us," said Larner. "I caught twenty beauties. I never knew fish to bite like that. Why, they—" and he was off on a voluminous discourse on a favorite subject.

Those assembled listened sympathetically. Then Tula took the fish, and soon the aroma of broiling trout mingled with the other entrancing galley odors.

After a dinner at which some weird yet satisfying viands were served and much unusual conversation indulged in, Nern Bela led the way to what appeared to be the captain's quarters. The crew and their visitor sat down to discuss a subject which proved to be of such a terrifying nature as to sear human souls.

"People on Venus," said Nern, as his eyes took on a worried expression, "are unable to leave their homes after nightfall due to some strange nocturnal beast which attacks them and vampirishly drains all blood from their veins, leaving the dead bodies limp and empty."

"What? How?" questioned Larner leaning far forward over the conference table.

The others nodded their heads, and in the eyes of the women there was terror. Larner could not but believe this.

"The beasts, or should I say insects, are as large as your horses and they fly, actually fly, by night, striking down humans, domestic animals and all creatures of warm blood. How many there are we have no means of knowing, and we cannot find their hiding and breeding places. They are not native to our planet, and where they come from we cannot imagine. They are actually monstrous flys, or bugs, or some form of insects."

LARNER was overcome by incredulity and showed it. "Insects as big as horses?" he questioned and he could hardly suppress a smile.

"Believe us, in the name of the God

of us all," insisted Nern. "They have a mouth which consists of a large suction disk, in the center of which is a lancelike tongue. The lance is forced into the body at any convenient point, and the suction disk drains out the blood. If we only knew their source! They attack young children and the aged, up to five hundred years, alike."

"What! Five hundred years?" exploded Larner again.

"I should have explained," said Nern, simply, "that Venus dwellers, due to our advanced knowledge of sanitation and health conversation, live about 800 years, and then die invariably of old age. The only unnatural cause of death encountered is this giant insect. Accidents do occur, but they are rare. There are no deliberate killings on Venus."

Larner did not answer. He only pondered. The more he ran over the strange happenings of the last week in his mind the more he believed he was dreaming. His thoughts took a strange turn: "Why do these vain people go around dressed in jeweled ornaments?"

Nern again anticipated a question. "Diamonds, gold and many of what you call precious stones are common on Venus," he volunteered. "Talc and many other things are more valuable."

"Talc?"

"Yes, we use an immense quantity of it. We have a wood that is harder than your steel. We build machinery with it. We cannot use oil to lubricate these wooden shafts and bearings as it softens the wood, so all parts exposed to friction are sprayed constantly by a gust of talc from a blower.

"You use talc mostly for toilet purposes. We use it for various purposes. There is little left on Venus, and it is more valuable to us than either gold or diamonds. We draw on your planet now for talc. You dump immense quantities. We just shipped one hundred 1,000-ton globes of it from the Cripple Creek district, and the district never missed it. We drew most of it from your mine dumps."

NERN tried not to look bored as he explained more in detail: "We brought 100 hollow spheres constructed of duranium. We suspended these over the Cripple Creek district at an altitude of 10,000 feet above the earth's surface. Because of the crystal glint of duranium they were invisible to earth dwellers at that height. Then we used a suction draft at night, drawing the talc from the earth, filling one drum after another. This is done by tuning in a certain selective attraction that attracts only talc. It draws it right out of your ground in tiny particles and assembles it in the transportation drums as pure talc. On the earth, if noticed at all, it would have been called a dust storm.

"The drums, when loaded with talc, are set to attract the proper planetary force and they go speeding toward Venus at the rate of 426,000 miles an hour. They are prevented from colliding with meteors by an automatic magnetic device. This is controlled by magnetic force alone, and when the targo gets too close to a meteor it changes its course instantly. The passenger targo we ride in acts similarly. And now may I return to the subject of the vampires of Venus?"

"Pardon my ignorance," said Larner, and for the first time in his life he felt very ignorant indeed.

"I know little more than I have told you," said Nern, rather hopelessly. "Our knowledge of your world, your people and your language comes from our listening in on you and observing you without being observed or heard. This might seem like taking an advantage of you, were it not for the fact that we respect confidences, and subjugate all else to science. We have helped you at times, by telepathically suggesting ideas to your thinkers.

"We would have given you all our inventions in this way, gladly, but in many instances we were unable to find minds attuned to accept such advanced ideas. We have had the advantage of

you because our planet is so many millions of years older than your own." There was a plaintive note in Nern's voice as he talked.

"BUT now we are on our knees to you, so to speak. We do not know everything and, desperately, we need the aid of a man of your caliber. In behalf of the distraught people of Venus, I am asking you bluntly to make a great sacrifice. Will you face the dangers of a trip to Venus and use your knowledge to aid us in exterminating these creatures of hell?" There was positive pleading in his voice, and in the eyes of his beautiful sister there were tears.

"But what would my superiors in the Government Bureau think?" feebly protested Larner, "I could not explain. . . ."

"You have no superiors in your line. Our Government needs you at this time more than any earthly government. Your place here is a fixture. You can always return to it, should you live. We are asking you to face a horrible death with us. You can name your own compensation, but I know you are not interested so much in reward.

"Now, honestly, my good professor, there is no advantage to be gained by explanation. Just disappear. In the name of God and in the interests of science and the salvation of a people who are at your mercy, just drop out of sight. Drop out of life on this planet. Come with us. The cause is worthy of the man I believe you to be."

"I will go," said Larner, and his hosts waited for no more. An instant later the targo shot out into interstellar space.

"How do you know what course to follow?" asked Larner after a reasonable time, when he had recovered from his surprise at the sudden take-off.

"We do not need to know. Our machine is tuned to be attracted by the planetary force of Venus alone. We could not go elsewhere. A repulsion ray finds us as we near Venus and protects us against too violent a landing. We will land on Venus like a feather about three months from to-night."

The time of the journey through outer space was of little moment save for one incident. Larner and the other travelers were suddenly and rather rudely jostled about the rapidly flying craft.

Larner lost his breath but not his speech. "What happened?" he inquired.

"We just automatically dodged a meteor," explained Nern.

MOST of the time of the trip was spent by Larner in listening to explanations of customs and traditions of the people of the brightest planet in the universe.

There was a question Larner had desired to ask Nern Bela, yet he hesitated to do so. Finally one evening during the journey to Venus, when the travelers had been occupying themselves in a scientific discussion of comparative evolution on the two planets, Larner saw his opportunity.

"Why," he asked rather hesitatingly, "did the people of Venus always remain so small? Why did you not strive more for height? The Japanese, who are the shortest in stature of earth people, always wanted to be tall."

"Without meaning any offense," replied Nern, "I must say that it is characteristic of earth dwellers to want something without knowing any good reason why they want it. It is perfectly all right for you people to be tall, but for us it is not so fitting. You see, Venus is smaller than the earth. Size is comparative. You think we are not tall because you are used to taller people. Comparatively we are tall enough. In proportion to the size of our planet we are exactly the right size. We keep our population at 900,000,000, and that is the perfectly exact number of people who can live comfortably on our planet."

ARRIVING on Venus, Larner was assigned a laboratory and office in one of the Government buildings. It was a world seemingly made of glass. Quartz, of rose, white and crystal coloring, Larner found, was the commonest country rock of the planet. In many cases it was shot full of splinters of gold which the natives had not taken the trouble to recover. This quartz was of a terrific hardness and was used in building, paving, and public works generally. The effect was bewildering. It was a world of shimmering crystal.

The atmosphere of Venus had long puzzled Larner. While not an astronomer in the largest sense of the word, yet he had a keen interest in the heavens as a giant puzzle picture, and he had given some spare time to the study.

He knew that from all indications Venus had a most unusual atmosphere. He had read that the atmosphere was considerably denser than that of the earth, and that its presence made observation difficult. The actual surface of the planet he knew could hardly be seen due, either to this atmosphere, or seemingly perpetual cloud banks.

He had read that the presence of atmosphere surrounding Venus is indicated to earthly astronomers, during the planet's transit, by rings of light due to the reflection and scattering of collected sunlight by its atmosphere.

Astronomers on earth, he knew, had long been satisfied of the presence of great cloud banks, as rocks and soils could not have such high reflecting power. He knew that like the moon, Venus, when viewed from the earth, presents different phases from the crescent to the full or total stage.

Looking up at the sky from the quartz streets of Venus, Larner beheld, in sweeping grandeur, massed cloudbanks, many of them apparently rain clouds.

Nern noted his skyward gaze, and said:

"We have accomplished meteorological control. Those clouds were brought under control when we conquered interplanetary force, and what you call gravity. We form them and move them at will. They are our rain factory. We make rain when and where we will. This insures our crops and makes for health and contentment.

"The air, you will note, is about the same or a little more moist than the earth air at sea level. This is due to the planet's position nearer the sun.

"We have been striving for centuries to make the air a little drier and more rare, but we have not succeeded yet. The heavy content of disintegrated quartz in our soil makes moisture very necessary for our crops, so our moist atmosphere is evidently a provision of providence. We are used to breathing this moist air, and when I first visited the earth I was made uncomfortable by your rarified atmosphere. Now I can adjust myself to breathing the air of either planet. However, I find myself drinking a great deal more water on earth than on Venus."

IN this fairyland which had enjoyed centuries of peace, health and accord, stark terror now reigned. In some instances the finely-bred, marvellously intelligent people were in a mental condition bordering on madness.

This was especially true in the farming districts, where whole herds of lats had been wiped out. Lats, Larner gleaned, were a common farm animal similar to the bovine species on earth, only more wooly. On these creatures the Venus dwellers depended for their milk and dairy supplies, and for their warmer clothing, which was made from the skin. The hair was used for brushes, in the building trades, and a thousand ways in manufacturing.

Besides the domestic animals hundreds of people continued to meet death, and only a few of the flying vampires had been hunted down. The giant insects were believed to breed

slowly as compared to earth insects, their females producing not more than ten eggs, by estimate, after which death overtook the adult. In spite of this they were reported to be increasing.

In the Government building Larner was placed in touch with all the Government scientists of Venus. His nearest collaborator was one Zorn Zada, most profound scientist of the planet. The two men, with a score of assistants, worked elbow to elbow on the most gigantic scientific mystery in the history of two planets.

A specimen of the dread invader was mounted and studied by the scientists, who were so engrossed in their work that they hardly took time to eat. As for sleep, there was little of it. Days were spent in research and nights in hunting the monsters. This hunting was done by newly recruited soldiers and scientists. The weapons used were a short ray-gun of high destructive power which disintegrated the bodies of the enemies by atomic energy blasts. The quarry was wary, however, and struck at isolated individuals rather than massed fighting lines.

SEATED at his work-bench Larner asked Zorn Zada what had become of Nern Bela. In his heart he had a horrible lurking fear that the beautiful Tula Bela might fall before a swarm of the strange vampires, but he did not voice this anxiety.

"Nern and his sister are explorers and navigators," was the reply. "They have been assigned to carry you anywhere on this or any other planet where your work may engage you. They await your orders. They are too valuable as space-navigators to be placed in harm's way."

Breathing a sigh of relief, Larner bent to his labors.

"What other wild animals or harmful insects have you on this planet?" he asked Zorn.

"I get your thought," replied the first scientist of Venus. "You are seeking a natural enemy to this deadly flying menace, are you not?"

"Yes," admitted Larner.

"All insects left on Venus with this one exception are beneficial," said Zorn. "There are no wild animals, and no harmful insects. All animals, insects and birds have been domesticated and are fed by their keepers. We get fabrics from forms of what you call spiders and other web-builders and cocoon spinners. All forms of birds, beasts and crawling and flying things have been brought under the dominion of man. We will have to seek another way out than by finding an enemy parasite."

"Where do you think these insect invaders came from?" asked Larner.

"You have noticed they are unlike anything you have on earth in anatomical construction," said the savant. "They partake of the general features of Coleoptera (beetles), in that they wear a sheath of armor, yet their mouth parts are more on the order of the Diptera (flys). I regard them more as a fly than a beetle, because most Coleoptera are helpful to humanity while practically all, if not all, Diptera are malignant.

"As to their original habitat, I believe they migrated here from some other planet."

"They could not fly through space," said Larner.

"No, that is the mystery of it," agreed Zorn. "How they got here and where they breed are the questions that we have to answer.

LONG days passed on Venus. Long days and sleepless nights. The big insects were hunted nightly by men armed with ray-guns, and nightly the blood-sucking monsters took their toll of humanity and animals.

Finally Larner and Zorn determined to capture one of the insects alive, muzzle its lance and suction pad, and give it sufficient freedom to find its way the shackled monster the scientists back to its hiding place. By following

hoped to find the breeding grounds. All the provinces of the planet joined in the drive. Men turned out in automatic vehicles, propelled by energy gathered from the atmosphere. They came on foot and in aircraft. Mobilization was at given points and, leading the van, were Zorn and Larner and their confreres in the targo of Nern and Tula Bern. The great army of Venus carried giant searchlights and was armed with deadly ray-guns.

HEADQUARTERS of the vast Army of Offense was in the targo of the Belas. Larner was in supreme command. Just before the big army set out to scour the planet to seek the breeding place of the monsters Larner issued a bulletin that set all Venus by the ears.

Addressed to President Vole Vesta of the Republic of Pana and the good people of Venus, it read:

As is generally known, it has been the habit of the nation's space-flying merchantmen to visit the sunlit side of the planet Mercury to obtain certain rare woods and other materials not found on this planet.

One side of Mercury, as is known, is always turned from the sun and is in a condition of perpetual night. In this perpetual darkness and dampness, where many rivers flow into warm black swamps, the vampires have bred for centuries. Conditions were ideal for their growth, and so through the ages they evolved into the monsters we have encountered lately on Venus.

During some comparatively recent visit to Mercury the grubs of these insects have found their way abroad a vegetation-laden targo left standing near the edge of the black swamps of Mercury. These grubs were thus transported to Venus and underwent their natural metamorphosis here. Reaching adult stage, they have found some place to hide and breed, and thus is explained the origin of the vampires of Venus.

This was widely read and discussed and was finally accepted as the means of the invasion of peaceful, beautiful Venus by a horror that might well have originated in hell.

However, this did not reveal the breeding grounds, or remove the nation-wide scourge of the horrible winged vampires, so the mobilization of all the forces of the planet continued.

AS day followed day the hordes of fighting Venus dwellers grew in the concentration camps. In the targo of the Belas, Larner, brain-weary and body-racked as he was with overwork, found a grain of happiness in being in the presence of Nern and his beautiful, petite sister.

With Zorn, Larner was supervising the construction of a big net of strongly woven wire mesh, in which it was hoped to catch one of the vampires. It was decided to bait the trap with a fat female lat.

Zorn, Larner and the Belas fared forth from the concentration camp followed by a company of soldiers carrying the big net. Tula with her own hand led the fat lat heifer. His eyes were filled with commiseration for the poor animal.

Thousands of soldiers and citizenry, in fighting array, watched the departure of the little group.

In a glade the trap was set and the net arranged to fall over the monster once it attacked the calf. From a thicket, in utter darkness, Zorn and Larner and the two Belas waited for the possible catch. The whole nation stood awaiting the order to advance.

On the fourth night the vigil was rewarded in a manner frightful to relate.

A clumsy flutter of giant wings broke the stillness.

The four waiting forms in the thicket rejoiced, believing the fat lat was about to be attacked.

Onward came the approaching hor-

ror. The measured flap, flap of its armored wings drawing nearer and nearer. Then, horror—horrors!

A feminine scream rent the air. Cries loud and shrill arose above a hysterical feminine cry for help.

The monster had chosen Tula Bela for its prey!

ZORN exploded an alarm bomb. A compressed air siren brought the army forward on the run. Giant floodlights began to light up the scene. The blood of Larner and Nern froze.

The monster had borne the girl to the ground. Its frightful lance and cupper was upraised to strike. Larner was the nearest and the quickest to act. He grabbed for his ray-gun, swung at his belt. It was gone! In horror he remembered he had left it at the base. He seized a short knife and threw himself forward, rolling his body between that of the girl and the descending lance and cupper.

As the lance pierced his shoulder Larner, in one wild gesture of frenzy, drove his knife through the soft, yielding flesh of the vampire's organ of suction.

Protected by no bony structure the snout of the monster was amputated.

The terrible creature had been disarmed of his most formidable weapon, but he continued to fight. Larner felt the spikes on the monster's legs tear at his flesh.

"Don't kill the thing," he shouted. "Bring on the net. For the love of God bring on the net!" Then he lost consciousness.

It was daylight when Larner, somewhat weakened from loss of blood, regained consciousness.

The beautiful Tula Bela was leaning over him.

She whispered comforting words to him in a language he did not fully understand. She whispered happy exclamations in words he did not know the meaning of, but the tone was unmistakably those of a sweetheart towards her lover.

Finally, in answer to a true scientist's question in his eyes, she said in English:

"They caught the thing alive. They await your order to advance."

"Let us be on our way," said Larner, and he started to arise.

"You are hardly strong enough," said Tula.

"Believe me, I am all right," insisted Larner, and after several trials he got to his feet. His constitution was naturally strong and his will was stronger, so he fought back all feelings of weakness and soon announced himself ready to go ahead with the project at hand. For speed was all important, and the young professor found himself unable to remain inactive.

HE rejoiced when Zorn told him that the big insect that had attacked Tula Bela had been captured alive and had been kept well nourished by lat's blood injected into its stomach.

With Zorn Larner went to inspect the hideous monstrosity and found it in leash and straining. It was ready to be used to lead the way back to its breeding place.

Its wings shackled, the lumbering insect floundered on its way straight north. Ponderously and half blindly it crawled as the searchlights' glare was kept far enough in advance to keep from blinding the monster.

True to instinct it finally brought up at early drawn under a high cliff of smoky quartz. Here, in the great crevices, the drove of diabolical vampires were hiding.

As the light struck their dens, they attempted clumsily to take wing, but a interlacing network of devastating disintegrating rays from the ray-guns shattered their bodies to dust, which was borne away by the wind.

The next few months was spent in combing the quartz crags of Venus for similar infested areas, but only the one breeding nest was found. The scourge had been conquered in its first and only stronghold.

SO ended the greatest reign of terror in the history of Venus.

Leslie Larner was given a vote of thanks, and riches were showered upon him by the good people of the sky's brightest star.

His modesty was characteristic, and he insisted that his part in saving humanity on the planet had been small.

Passage back to earth was offered him, but Nern and Tula Bela urged him to stay and live his life on Venus. This he finally agreed to do.

"If I returned," he said, "I would always be tempted to tell my experiences while away, and there is not a jury in the world which would account me sane after I had once spoken."

THAT the story of Larner's adventures reached earth dwellers at all is due to the fact that Nern Bela on a subsequent visit to the earth narrated it to a Colorado quartz miner. This miner, a bronzed and bearded prospector for gold, stumbled on the targo in a mountain fastness, and there was nought to do but make him welcome and pledge him to secrecy.

The miner surveyed the crystal targo in rapt wonderment and said: "And to think I am the only earth man who ever viewed such a craft!"

"No," answered Nern Bela, "there is one other." And then the stirring story of Lealie Larner's life on Venus was told.

SAFE FLYING IN FOGS

THE outstanding development in aviation recently, and one of the most significant so far in aviation history was the "blind" flight of Lieut. James H. Doolittle, daredevil of the Army Air Corps, at Mitchel Field, L. I., which led Harry F. Guggenheim, President of the Daniel Guggenheim Fund for the Promotion of Aeronautics, Inc., to announce that the problem of fog-flying, one of aviation's greatest bugbears, had been solved at last.

There has been "blind flying" done in the past but never before in the history of aviation has any pilot taken off, circled, crossed, re-crossed the field, then landed only a short distance away from his starting point while flying under conditions resembling the densest fog, as Lieut. "Jimmy" Doolittle has done, in his Wright-motored "Husky" training-plane. It was something uncanny to contemplate.

The "dense fog" was produced artificially by the simple device of making the cabin of the plane entirely light-proof. Once seated inside, the flyer, with his co-pilot, Lieut. Benjamin Kelsey, also of Mitchel Field, were completely shut off from any view of the world outside. All they had to depend on were three new flying instruments, developed during the past year in experiments conducted over the full-flight laboratory established by the Fund at Mitchel Field.

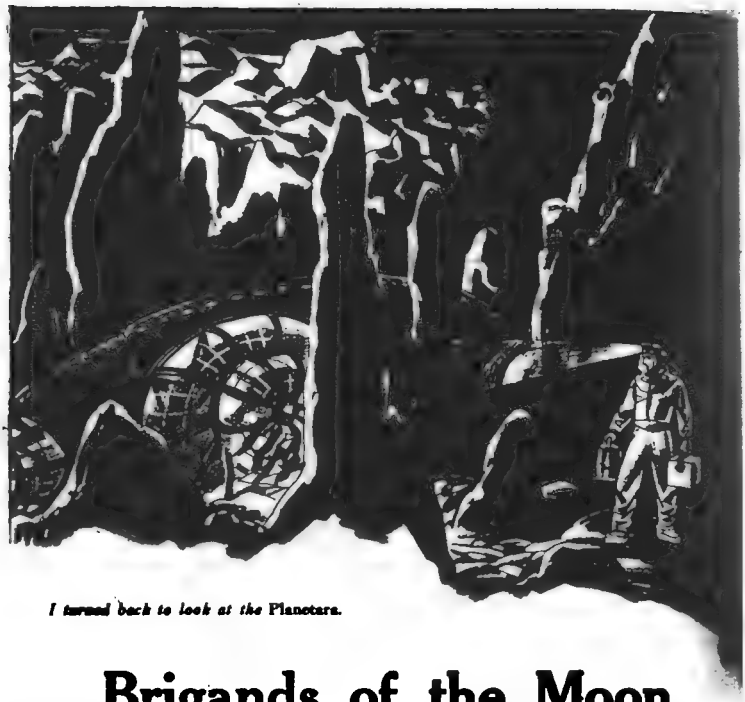
The chief factors contributing to the solution of the problem of blind flying consist of a new application of the visual radio beacon, the development of an improved instrument for indicating the longitudinal and lateral position of an airplane, a new directional gyroscope, and a sensitive barometric altimeter, so delicate as to measure the altitude of an airplane within a few feet of the ground.

Thus, instead of relying on the natural horizon for stability, Lieut. Doolittle uses an "artificial horizon" on the small instrument which indicates longitudinal and lateral position in relation to the ground at all time. He was able to locate the landing field by means of the direction-finding long-distance radio beacon. In addition, another, smaller radio beacon had been installed, casting a beam fifteen to twenty miles in either direction, which governs the immediate approach to the field.

To locate the landing field the pilot watches two vibrating reeds, tuned to the radio beacon, on a visual radio receiver on his instrument board. If he turns to the right or left of his course the right or the left reed, respectively, begins doing a sort of St. Vitus dance. If the reeds are in equilibrium the pilot knows it is clear sailing straight to his field.

The sensitive altimeter showed Lieut. Doolittle his altitude and made it possible for him to calculate his landing to a distance of within a few feet from the ground.

Probably the strangest device of all that Lieut. Doolittle has been called upon to test in Mr. Guggenheim's war against fog is a sort of heat cannon that goes forth to combat like a fire-breathing dragon of old. Like the enemies of the dragon, the fog is supposed to curl up and die before the scorching breath of the "hot air artillery" although the fundamental principle behind the device is a great deal more scientific than such an explanation sounds. It is, in brief, based on the known fact that fog forms only in a very narrow temperature zone which lies between the saturation and precipitation points of the atmosphere. If the air grows a little colder the fog turns into rain and falls; if it is warmed very slightly the mist disappears and the air is once more normally clear, although its humidity is very close to the maximum.



I turned back to look at the Planetara.

Brigands of the Moon

(The Book of Gregg Haljan)

PART TWO OF A FOUR-PART NOVEL

By Ray Cummings

MY name, Gregg Haljan. My age, twenty-five years. My occupation, at the time my narrative begins, in 2075, was third officer of the Interplanetary Space-ship *Planetara*.

Thus I introduce myself to you. For this is a continuation of the book of Gregg Haljan, and of necessity I am the chief actor therein. I shall recapitulate very briefly what has happened so far:

Out of awful space tumbled the Space-ship *Planetara* towards the Moon, her officers dead, with bandits at her helm—and the controls out of order!

Unscrupulous Martian brigands were scheming for Johnny Grantline's secret radium-ore treasure, dug out of the Moon and waiting there to be picked up by the *Planetara* on her return trip from Mars.

The *Planetara* left, bound for Mars, some ten days away. Suspicious interplanetary passengers were aboard: Miko and Moa, a brother and a sister of Mars; Sir Arthur Coniston, a mysterious Englishman; Ob Hahn, a Venus mystic. And small, effeminate George Prince and his sister, Anita. Love, I think, was born instantly between Anita

and me. I found all too soon that Miko, the sinister giant from Mars, also desired her.

As we neared the Moon we received Grantline's secret message: "Stop for ore on your return voyage. Success beyond wildest hopes!" But I soon discovered that an eavesdropper in an invisible cloak had overheard it!

Soon afterwards Miko accidentally murdered a person identified as Anita Prince.

Then, in the confusion that resulted, Miko struck his great blow. The crew of the *Planetara*, secretly in his pay, rose up and killed the captain and all the officers but Snap Dean, the radio-helio operator, and myself.

I was beseiged in the chart-room. George Prince leaped in upon me—and put his arms around me. I looked at him closer—only to discover it was Anita, disguised as her brother! It was her brother, George, who had been killed! George had been in the brigands' confidence—thus Anita was able to spy for us.

Quickly we plotted. I would surrender to her, Anita Prince, whom the brigands thought was George Prince. Together we might possibly be able, with Snap's help, to turn the tide, and reclaim the *Planetara*.

I was taken to my stateroom and locked there until Miko the brigand leader, should come to dispose of me. But I cared not what had happened—Anita was alive!

CHAPTER XIV

The Brigand Leader

THE giant Miko stood confronting me. He slid my cubby door closed behind him. He stood with his head towering close against my ceiling. His cloak was discarded. In his leather clothes, and with his clanking sword-ornament, his aspect carried the swagger of a brigand of old. He was bareheaded; the light from one of my tubes fell upon his grinning, leering gray face.

"So, Gregg Haljan? You have come to your senses at last. You do not wish me to write my name upon your chest? I would not have done that to Dean; he forced me. Sit back."

I had been on my bunk. I sank back at the gesture of his huge hairy arm. His forearm was bare now; the scar of a burn on it was plain to be seen. He remarked my gaze.

"True. You did that, Haljan, in Great-New York. But I bear you no malice. I want to talk to you now."

He cast about for a seat, and took the little stool which stood by my desk. His hand held a small cylinder of the Martian paralyzing ray; he rested it beside him on the desk.

"Now we can talk."

I remained silent. Alert. Yet my thoughts were whirling. Anita was alive. Masquerading now as her brother. And, with the joy of it, came a shudder. Above everything, Miko must not know.

"A great adventure we are upon, Haljan."

MY thoughts came back. Miko was talking with an assumption of friendly comradeship. "All is well—and we need you, as I have said before. I am no fool. I have been aware of everything that went on aboard this ship. You, of all the officers, are most clever at the routine mathematics. Is that so?"

"Perhaps," I said.

"You are modest." He fumbled at a pocket of his jacket, produced a scroll-sheaf. I recognized it: Blackstone's figures; the calculation Blackstone roughly made of the elements of the asteroid we had passed.

"I am interested in these," Miko went on. "I want you to verify them. And this." He held up another scroll. "This is the calculation of our present position. And our course. Hahn claims he is a navigator. We have set the ship's gravity plates—see, like this—"

He handed me the scrolls; he watched me keenly as I glanced over them.

"Well?" I said.

"You are sparing of words, Haljan. By the devils of the airways, I could make you talk! But I want to be friendly."

I HANDED him back the scrolls. I stood up; I was almost within reach of his weapon, but with a sweep of his great arm he abruptly knocked me back to my bunk.

"You dare?" Then he smiled. "Let us not come to blows!"

"No," I said. I returned his smile. In truth, physical violence could get me nothing in dealing with this fellow. I would have to try guile. And I saw now that his face was flushed and his eyes unaturally bright. He had been drinking alcolite; not enough to befuddle him— but enough to make him triumphantly talkative.

"Hahn may not be much of a mathematician," I suggested. "But there is your Sir Arthur Coniston." I managed a sarcastic grin. "Is that his name?"

"Almost. Haljan, will you verify these figures?"

"Yes. But why? Where are we going?"

He laughed. "You are afraid I will not tell you! Why should I not? This great adventure of mine is progressing perfectly. A tremendous stake, Haljan. A hundred millions of dollars in gold-leaf: there will be fabulous riches for us all, when that radium ore is sold for a hundred million in gold leaf."

"But where are we going?"

"To that asteroid," he said abruptly. "I must get rid of these passengers. I am no murderer."

WITH half a dozen killings in the recent fight this was hardly convincing. But he was obviously wholly serious. He seemed to read my thoughts.

"I kill only when necessary. We will land upon the asteroid. A perfect place to maroon the passengers. Is it not so? I will give them the necessities of life. They will be able to signal. And in a month or so, when we are safely finished with our adventure, a police ship no doubt will rescue them."

"And then, from the asteroid," I suggested, "we are going—"

"To the Moon, Haljan. What a clever guesser you are! Coniston and Hahn are calculating our course. But I have no great confidence in them. And so I want you."

"You have me."

"Yes. I have you. I would have killed you long ago—I am an impulsive fellow—but my sister restrained me."

He gazed at me slyly. "Moa seems strangely to like you, Haljan."

"Thanks," I said. "I'm flattered."

"She still hopes I may really win you to join us," he went on. "Gold-leaf is a wonderful thing; there would be plenty for you in this affair. And to be rich, and have the love of a woman like Moa. . . ."

He paused. I was trying cautiously to gauge him, to get from him all the information I could. I said, with another smile, "That is premature, to talk of Moa. I will help you chart your course. But this venture, as you call it, is dangerous. A police-ship—"

"There are not many," he declared. "The chances of us encountering one is very slim." He grinned at me. "You know that as well as I do. And we now have those code pass-words—I forced Dean to tell me where he had hidden them. If we should be challenged, our pass-word answer will relieve suspicion."

"The *Planetara*," I objected, "being overdue at Ferrok-Shahn, will cause alarm. You'll have a covey of patrol-ships after you."

"That will be two weeks from now," he smiled. "I have a ship of my own in Ferrok-Shahn. It lies there waiting now, manned and armed. I am hoping that, with Dean's help, we may be able to flash it a signal. It will join us on the Moon. Fear not for the danger, Haljan. I have great interests allied with me in this thing. Plenty of money. We have planned carefully."

HE was idly fingering his cylinder; his gaze roved me as I sat docile on my bunk. "Did you think George Prince was a leader of this? A mere boy. I engaged him a year ago—his knowledge of ores is valuable."

My heart was pounding, but I strove not to show it. He went on calmly.

"I told you I am impulsive. Half a dozen times I have nearly killed George Prince, and he knows it." He frowned. "I wish I had killed him, instead of his sister. That was an error."

There was a note of real concern in his voice. Did he love Anita Prince? It seemed so.

He added, "That is done—nothing can change it. George Prince is helpful to me. Your friend Dean is another. I had trouble with him, but he is docile now."

I said abruptly, "I don't know whether your promise means anything or not, Miko. But George Prince said you would use no more torture."

"I won't. Not if you and Dean obey me."

"You tell Dean I have agreed to that. You say he gave you the code-words we took from Johnson?"

"Yes. There was a fool! That Johnson! You blame me, Haljan, for the killing of Captain Carter? You need not. Johnson offered to try and capture you. Take you alive. He killed Carter because he was angry at him. A stupid, vengeful fool! He is dead, and I am glad of it."

MY mind was on Miko's plans. I ventured. "This treasure on the Moon—did you say it was on the Moon?"

"Don't be an idiot," he retorted. "I know as much about Grantline as you do."

"That's very little."

"Perhaps."

"Perhaps you know more, Miko. The Moon is a big place. Where, for instance, is Grantline located?"

I held my breath. Would he tell me that? A score of questions—vague plans—were in my mind. How skilled at mathematics were these brigands? Miko, Hahn, Coniston—could I fool them? If I could learn Grantline's location on the Moon, and keep the *Planetara* away from it. A pretended error of charting. Time lost—and perhaps Snap could find an opportunity to signal Earth, get help.

Miko answered my question as bluntly as I asked it. "I don't know where Grantline is located. But we will find out. He will not suspect the *Planetara*. When we get close to the Moon, we will signal and ask him. We can trick him into telling us. You think I do not know what is on your mind, Haljen? There is a secret code of signals arranged between Dean and Grantline. I have forced Dean to confess it. Without torture! Prince helped me in that. He persuaded Dean not to defy me. A very persuasive fellow, George Prince. More diplomatic than I am, I give him credit."

I strove to hold my voice calm. "If I should join you, Miko—my word, if I ever gave it, you would find dependable—I would say George Prince is very valuable to us. You should rein your temper. He is half your size—you might some time, without intention, do him injury.' '

HE laughed. "Moa says so. But have no fear—"

"I was thinking," I persisted, "I'd like to have a talk with George Prince."

Ah, my pounding, tumultous heart! But I was smiling calmly. And I tried to put into my voice a shrewd note of cupidity. "I really know very little about this treasure, Miko. If there were a million or two of gold-leaf in it for me—"

"Perhaps there would be."

"I was thinking. Suppose you let me have a talk with Prince? I have some knowledge of radium ores. His skill and mine — a calculation of what Grantline's treasure may really be. You don't know; you are only assuming."

I paused. Whatever may have been in Miko's mind I cannot say. But abruptly he stood up. I had left my bunk, but he waved me back.

"Sit down. I am not like Moa. I would not trust you just because you protested you would be loyal." He picked up his cylinder. "We will talk again." He gestured to the scrolls he had left upon my desk. "Work on those. I will judge you by the results."

He was no fool, this brigand leader.

"Yes," I agreed. "You want a true course now to the asteroid?"

"Yes. I will get rid of these passengers. Then we will plan further. Do your best, Haljan—no error! By the Gods, I warn you I can check up on you!"

I said meekly, "Very well. But you ask Prince if he wants my calculations of Grantline's ore-body."

I shot Miko a foxy look as he stood by my door. I added, "You think you are clever. There is plenty you don't know. Our first night out from the Earth—Grantline's signals—didn't it ever occur to you that I might have some figures on his treasure?"

It startled him. "Were are they?"

I tapped my forehead. "You don't suppose I was foolish enough to record them. You ask Prince if he wants to talk to me. A high thorium content in ore—you ask Prince. A hundred millions, or two hundred. It would make a big difference, Miko."

"I will think about it." He backed out and sealed the door upon me once again.

BUT Anita did not come. I verified Hahn's figures, which were very nearly correct. I charted a course for the asteroid; it was almost the one which had been set.

Coniston came for my results. "I say, we are not so bad as navigators, are we? I think we're jolly good, considering our inexperience. Not bad at all, eh?"

"No."

I did not think it wise to ask him about Prince.

"Are you hungry, Haljan?" he demanded.

"Yes."

A steward came with a meal. The saturnine Hahn stood at my door with a weapon upon me while I ate. They were taking no chances—and they were wise not to.

The day passed. Day and night, all the same of aspect here in the starry vault of Space. But with the ship's routine it was day.

And then another time of sleep. I slept, fitfully, worrying, trying to plan. Within a few hours we would be nearing the asteroid.

The time of sleep was nearly passed. My chronometer marked five A. M. of our original Earth starting time. The seal of my cubby door hissed. The door slowly opened.

Anita!

She stood there with her cloak around her. A distance away on the shadowed deck-space Coniston was loitering.

"Anita!" I whispered it.

"Gregg, dear!"

She turned and gestured to the watching brigand. "I will not be long, Coniston."

She came in and half closed the door upon us, leaving it open enough so that we could make sure that Coniston did not advance.

I stepped back where he could not see us.

"Anita!"

She flung herself into my opened arms.

CHAPTER XV

The Masquerader

A MOMENT when beyond all thought of the nearby brigand—or the possibility of an eavesdropping ray trained now upon my little cubby—a moment while Anita and I held each other; and whispered those things which could mean nothing to the world, but which were all the world to us.

Then it was she whose wits brought us back from the shining fairyland of our love, into the sinister reality of the *Planetara*.

"Gregg, if they are listening—"

I pushed her away. This brave little masquerader! Not for my life, or for all the lives on the ship, would I consciously have endangered her.

"But therefore!" I said aloud. "There was, in Grantline's message—See here, Prince."

Coniston was too far away on the deck to hear us. Anita went to my door again and waved at him reassuringly. I put my ear to the door opening, and listened at the space across the grid of the ventilator over my bunk. The hum of a vibration would have been audible at those two points. But there was nothing.

"It's all right," I whispered. "Anita—not you who was killed! I can hardly realize it now. Not you whom they buried yesterday morning."

We stood and whispered, and she clung to me—so small beside me. With the black robe thrown aside, it seemed that I could not miss the curves of her woman's figure. A dangerous game she was playing. Her hair had been cut short to the base of her neck, in the fashion of her dead brother. Her eyelashes had been clipped; the line of her brows altered. And now, in the light of my tube as it shone upon her earnest face, I could remark other changes. Glutz, the little beauty specialist, was in this secret. With plastic skill he had altered the set of her jaw with his wax—put masculinity there.

She was whispering: "It was—was poor George whom Miko shot."

I HAD now the true version of what had occurred. Miko had been forcing his wooing upon Anita. George Prince was a weakling whose only good quality was a love for his sister. Some years ago he had fallen into evil ways. Been arrested, and then discharged from his position with the Federated Radium Corporation. He had taken up with evil companions in Great-New York. Mostly Martians. And Miko had met him. His technical knowledge, his training with the Federated Corporation, made him valuable to Miko's enterprise. And so Prince had joined the brigands.

Of all this, Anita had been unaware. She had never liked Miko. Feared him. And it seemed that the Martian had some hold upon her brother, which puzzled and frightened Anita.

Then Miko had fallen in love with her. George had not liked it. And that night on the *Planetara*, Miko had come and knocked upon Anita's door. Incautiously she opened it; he forced himself in. And when she repulsed him, struggled with him, George had been awakened.

She was whispering to me now. "My room was dark. We were all three struggling. George was holding me—the shot came—and I screamed."

And Miko had fled, not knowing whom his shot had hit in the darkness.

"And when George died, Captain Carter wanted me to impersonate him. We planned it with Dr. Frank, to try and learn what Miko and the others were doing. Because I never knew that poor George had fallen into such evil things."

I COULD only hold her thankfully in my arms. The lost what-might-have-been seemed coming back to us.

"And they cut my hair, Gregg, and Glutz altered my face a little, and I did my best. But there was no time—it came upon us so quickly."

And she whispered, "But I love you, Gregg. I want to be the first to say it: I love you—I love you."

But we had the sanity to try and plan.

"Anita, when you go back, tell Miko we discussed radium ores. You'll have to be careful, clever. Don't say too much. Tell him we estimate the treasure at a hundred and thirty millions."

I told her what Miko had vouchsafed me of his plans. She knew all that. And Snap knew it. She had had a few moments alone with Snap. Gave me now a message from him:

"We'll pull out of this, Gregg."

With Snap she had worked out a plan. There were Snap and I; and Shac and Dud Ardley, upon whom we could doubtless depend. And Dr. Frank. Against us were Miko and his sister; and Coniston and Hahn. Of course there were the members of the crew. But we were numerically the stronger when it came to true leadership. Unarmed and guarded now. But if we could break loose—recapture the ship. . . .

I sat listening to Anita's eager whispers. It seemed feasible. Miko did not altogether trust George Prince; Anita was now unarmed.

"But I can make opportunity! I can get one of their ray cylinders, and an invisible cloak equipment."

That cloak—it had been hidden in Miko's room when Carter searched for it in A20—was now in the chart-room by Johnson's body. It had been repaired now; Anita thought she could get possession of it.

WE worked out the details of the plan. Anita would arm herself, and come and release me. Together, with a paralyzing ray, we could creep aboard the ship, overcome these brigands one by one. There were so few of the leaders. With them felled, and with us in control of the turret and the helio-room, we could force the crew to stay at their posts. There were, Anita said, no navigators among Miko's

crew. They would not dare oppose us.

"But it should be done at once, Anita. In a few hours we will be at the asteroid."

"Yes. I will go now—try and get the weapons."

"Where is Snap?"

"Still in the helio-room. One of the crew guards him."

Coniston was roaming the ship; he was still loitering on the deck, watching our door. Hahn was in the turret. The morning watch of the crew were at their posts in the hull-corridors; the stewards were preparing a morning meal. There were nine members of subordinates altogether, Anita had calculated. Six of them were in Miko's pay; the other three—our own men who had not been killed in the fighting—had joined the brigands.

"And Dr. Frank, Anita?"

He was in the lounge. All the passengers were herded there, with Miko and Moa alternating on guard.

"I will arrange it with Venza," Anita whispered swiftly. "She will tell the others. Dr. Frank knows about it now. He thinks it can be done."

THE possibility of it swept me anew. The brigands were of necessity scattered singly about the ship. One by one, creeping under cover of an invisible cloak, I could fell them, and replace them without alarming the others. My thoughts leaped to it. We would strike down the guard in the helio-room. Release Snap. At the turret we could assail Hahn, and replace him with Snap.

Coniston's voice outside broke in upon us. "Prince."

He was coming forward. Anita stood in the doorway. "I have the figures, Coniston. By God, this Haljan is with us! And clever! We think it will total a hundred and thirty millions. What a stake!"

She whispered, "Gregg, dear—I'll be back soon. We can do it—be ready."

"Anita—be careful of yourself! If they should suspect you. . . ."

"I'll be careful. In an hour, Gregg, or less, I'll come back. All right, Coniston. Where is Miko? I want to see him. Stay where you are, Haljan! All in good time Miko will trust you with your liberty. You'll be rich like us all, never fear."

She swaggered out upon the deck, waved at the brigand, and banged my cubby door in my face.

I sat upon my bunk. Waiting. Would she come back? Would she be successful?

CHAPTER XVI

In the Blue-lit Corridor

SHE came. I suppose it was no more than an hour: it seemed an eternity of apprehension. There was the slight hissing of the seal of my door. The panel slid. I had leaped from my bunk where in the darkness I was lying tense.

"Prince?" I did not dare say, "Anita."

"Gregg."

Her voice. My gaze swept the deck as the panel opened. Neither Coniston nor anyone else was in sight, save Anita's dark-robed figure which came into my room.

"You got it?" I asked her in a low whisper.

I held her for an instant, kissed her. But she pushed me away with quick hands.

"Gregg, dear—"

She was breathless. My kisses, and the tenseness of what lay before us were to blame.

"Gregg, see, I have it. Give us a little light—we must hurry!"

In the blue dimness I saw that she was holding one of the Martian cylinders. The smaller size: it would paralyze, but not kill.

"Only one, Anita?"

"Yes. I had it before, but Miko took it from me. It was in his room. And this—"

The invisible cloak. We laid it on my grid, and I adjusted its mechanism,

A cloak of the reflecting-absorbing variety.*

I DONNED it, and drew its hood, and threw on its current.

"All right, Anita?"

"Yes."

"Can you see me?"

"No." She stepped back a foot or two further. "Not from here. But you must let no one approach too close."

Then she came forward, put out her hand, fumbled until she found me.

It was our plan to have me follow her out. Anyone observing us would see only the robed figure of the supposed George Prince, and I would escape notice.

The situation about the ship was almost unchanged. Anita had secured the weapon and the cloak and slipped away to my cubby without being observed.

"You're sure of that!"

"I think so, Gregg. I was careful."

Moa was now in the lounge, guarding the passengers. Hahn was asleep in the chart-room; Coniston was in the turret. Coniston would be off duty presently, Anita said, with Hahn taking his place. There were look-outs in the forward and stern watch-towers, and a guard upon Snap in the helio-room.

"Is he inside the room, Anita?"

"Snap? Yes."

"No—the guard."

"No. He was sitting upon the spider bridge at the door."

THIS was unfortunate. That guard could see all the deck clearly. He might be suspicious of George Prince wandering around; it would be difficult to get near enough to assail him. This cylinder, I knew, had an effective range of only some twenty feet.

Anita and I were swiftly whispering. It was necessary now to decide exactly what we were to do; once under observation outside, there must be no hesitation, no fumbling.

"Coniston is sharpest, Gregg. He will be the hardest to get near."

The languid-spoken Englishman was the one Anita most feared. His alert eyes seemed to miss nothing. Perhaps he was suspicious of this George Prince—Anita thought so.

"But where is Miko?" I whispered.

The brigand leader had gone below a few moments ago, down into the hull-corridor. Anita had seized the opportunity to come to me.

"We can attack Hahn in the chart-room first," I suggested. "And get the other weapons. Are they still there?"

"Yes. But Gregg, the forward deck is very bright."

We were approaching the asteroid. Already its light like a brilliant moon was brightening the forward deck-space. It made me realize how much haste was necessary.

We decided to go down into the hull-corridors. Locate Miko. Fell him, and hide him. His non-appearance back on deck would very soon throw the others into confusion, especially now with our impending landing upon the asteroid. And under cover of this confusion we would try and release Snap.

We had been arguing no more than a minute or two. We were ready. Anita slid my door wide. She stepped through, with me soundlessly scurrying after her. The empty, silent deck was alternately dark with shadow-patches and bright with blobs of starlight. A sheen of the Sun's corona was mingled with it; and from forward came the radiance of the asteroid's mellow silver glow.

* The principle of this invisible cloak involves the use of an electronized fabric. All color is absorbed. The light rays reflected to the eye of the observer thus show an image of empty blackness. There is also created about the cloak a magnetic field which by natural laws bends the rays of light from objects behind it. This principle of the natural bending of light when passing through a magnetic field was first recognized by Albert Einstein, a scientist of the Twentieth century. In the case of this invisible cloak, the bending light rays, by making visible what was behind the cloak's blackness, thus destroyed its solid black outline and gave a pseudo-invisibility which was fairly effective under favorable conditions.

ANITA turned to seal my door; within my faintly humming cloak I stood beside her. Was I invisible in this light? Almost directly over us, close under the dome, the look-out sat in his little tower. He gazed down at Anita.

Amidships, high over the cabin superstructure, the helio-room hung dark and silent. The guard on its bridge was visible. He, too, looked down.

A tense instant. Then I breathed again. There was no alarm. The two guards answered Anita's gesture.

Anita said aloud into my empty cubby: "Miko will come for you presently, Haljan. He told me to tell you that he wants you at the turret controls to land us on the asteroid."

She finished sealing my door and turned away; started forward along the deck. I followed. My steps were soundless in my elastic-bottomed shoes. Anita swaggered with a noisy tread. Near the door of the smoking room a small incline passage led downward. We went into it.

The passage was dimly blue-lit. We descended its length, came to the main corridor, which ran the length of the hull. A vaulted metal passage, with doors to the control rooms opening from it. Dim lights showed at intervals.

THE humming of the ship was more apparent here. It drowned the slight humming of my cloak. I crept after Anita; my hand under the cloak clutched the ray weapon.

A steward passed us. I shrank aside to avoid him.

Anita spoke to him. "Where is Miko, Ellis?"

"In the ventilator-room, Mr. Prince. There was difficulty with the air renewal."

Anita nodded, and moved on. I could have felled that steward as he passed me. Oh, if I only had, how different things might have been!

But it seemed needless. I let him go, and he turned into a nearby door which led to the galley.

Anita moved forward. If we could come upon Miko alone. Abruptly she turned, and whispered, "Gregg, if other men are with him, I'll draw him away. You watch your chance."

What little things may overthrow one's careful plans! Anita had not realized how close to her I was following. And her turning so unexpectedly caused me to collide with her sharply.

"Oh!" She exclaimed it involuntarily. Her outflung hand had unwittingly gripped my wrist, caught the electrode there. The touch burned her, and close-circuited my robe. There was a hiss. My current burned out the tiny fuses.

My invisibility was gone! I stood, a tall black-hooded figure, revealed to the gaze of anyone who might be near!

The futile plans of humans! We had planned so carefully! Our calculations, our hopes of what we could do, came clattering now in a sudden wreckage around us.

"Anita, run!"

If I were seen with her, then her own disguise would probably be discovered. That above everything would be disaster.

"Anita, get away from me! I must try it alone!"

I COULD hide somewhere, repair the cloak perhaps. Or, since now I was armed, why could I not boldly start an assault?

"Gregg, we must get you back to your cubby!" She was clinging to me in a panic.

"No! You run! Get away from me! Don't you understand? George Prince has no business here with me! They'd kill you!"

Or worse—Miko would discover it was Anita, not George Prince.

"Gregg, let's get back to the deck."

I pushed at her. Both of us in sudden confusion.

From behind me there came a shout. That accursed steward! He had re-

turned, to investigate perhaps what George Prince was doing in this corridor. He heard our voices; his shout in the silence of the ship sounded horribly loud. The white-clothed shape of him was in the nearby doorway. He stood stricken in surprise at seeing me. And then turned to run.

I fired my paralyzing cylinder through my cloak. Got him! He fell. I shoved Anita violently.

"Run! Tell Miko to come—tell him you heard a shout! He won't suspect you!"

"But Gregg—"

"You mustn't be found out! You're our only hope, Anita! I'll hide, fix the cloak, or get back to my cubby. We'll try it again."

It decided her. She scurried down the corridor. I whirled the other way. The steward's shout might not have been heard.

Then realization flashed to me. That steward would be revived. He was one of Miko's men: for two voyages he had been a spy upon the *Planetara*. He would be revived and tell what he had seen and heard. Anita's disguise would be revealed.

A cold-blooded killing I do protest went against me. But it was necessary. I flung myself upon him. I beat his skull with the metal of my cylinder.

I stood up. My hood had fallen back from my head. I wiped my bloody hands on my useless cloak. I had smashed the cylinder.

"Haljan!"

ANITA'S voice! A sharp note of horror and warning. I became aware that in the corridor, forty feet down its dim length, Miko had appeared, with Anita behind him. His rifle-bullet-projector was leveled. It spat at me. But Anita had pulled at his arm.

The explosive report was sharply deafening in the confined space of the corridor. With a spurt of flame the leaden pellet struck over my head against the vaulted ceiling

Miko was struggling with Anita. "Prince, you idiot!"

"Miko, don't! It's Haljan! Don't kill him—"

The turmoil brought members of the crew. From the shadowed oval near me they came running. I flung the useless cylinder at them. But I was trapped in the narrow passage.

I might have fought my way out. Or Miko might have shot me. But there was the danger that, in her horror, Anita would betray herself.

I backed against the wall. "Don't kill me! See, I will not fight!"

I flung up my arms. And the crew, emboldened, and courageous under Miko's gaze, leaped on me and bore me down.

The futile plans of humans! Anita and I had planned so carefully, and in a few brief minutes of action it had come only to this!

CHAPTER XVII

A Woman of Mars

"SO, Gregg Haljan, you are not as loyal as you pretend!"

Miko was livid with suppressed anger. They had stripped the cloak from me, and flung me back in my cubby. Miko was now confronting me; at the door Moa stood watching. And Anita was behind her. I sat outwardly defiant and sullen on my bunk. But I was alert and tense, fearful still of what Anita's emotion might betray her into doing.

"Not so loyal," Miko repeated. "And a fool! Do you think I am such a child you can escape me!"

He swung around. "How did he get out of here? Prince, you came in here!"

My heart was wildly thumping. But Anita retorted with a touch of spirit:

"I came to tell him what you commanded. To check Hahn's latest figures—and to be ready to take the controls when we go into the asteroid's atmosphere."

"Well, how did he get out?"

"How should I know?" she parried. Little actress! Her spirit helped to allay my fear. She held her cloak close around her in the fashion they had come to expect from the George Prince who had just buried his sister. "How should I know, Miko? I sealed his door."

"But did you?"

"Of course he did," Moa put in.

"Ask your look-outs," said Anita. "They saw me—I waved to them just as I sealed the door."

I ventured, "I have been taught to open doors." I managed a sly, lugubrious smile. "I shall not try it again, Miko."

Nothing had been said about my killing of the steward. I thanked my constellations now that he was dead. "I shall not try it again," I repeated.

A glance passed between Miko and his sister. Miko said abruptly, "You seem to realize that it is not my purpose to kill you. And you presume upon it."

"I shall not again." I eyed Moa. She was gazing at me steadily. She said, "Leave me with him, Miko. . ." She smiled. "Gregg Haljan, we are no more than twenty thousand miles from the asteroid now. The calculations for retarding are now in operation."

IT was what had taken Miko below, that and trouble with the ventilating system, which was soon rectified. But the retarding of the ship's velocity when nearing a destination required accurate manipulation. These brigands were fearful of their own skill. That was obvious. It gave me confidence. I was really needed. They would not harm me. Except for Miko's impulsive temper, I was in no danger from them —not now, certainly.

Moa was saying, "I think I may make you understand, Gregg. We have tremendous riches within our grasp."

"I know it." I added with sudden thought, "But there are many with whom to divide this treasure. . . ."

Miko caught my intended implication. "By the infernal, this fellow may have felt he could seize the treasure for himself! Because he is a navigator!"

Moa said vehemently, "Do not be an idiot, Gregg! You could not do it! There will be fighting with Grantline."

My purpose was accomplished. They seemed to see me a willing outlaw like themselves. As though it were a bond between us. And they could win me.

"Leave me with him," said Moa.

Miko acquiesced. "For a few minutes only." He proffered a heat-ray cylinder, but she refused it.

"I am not afraid of him."

Miko swung on me. "Within an hour we will be nearing the atmosphere. Will you take the controls?"

"Yes."

HE set his heavy jaw. His eyes bored into me. "You're a strange fellow, Haljan. I can't make you out. I am not angry now. Do you think, when I am deadly serious, that I mean what I say?"

His calm words set a sudden shiver over me. I checked my smile.

"Yes," I said.

"Well then, I will tell you this: not for all of Prince's well-meaning interference, or Moa's liking for you, or my own need of your skill, will I tolerate more trouble from you. The next time—I will kill you. Do you believe me?"

"Yes."

"That is all I want to say. You kill my men, and my sister says I must not hurt you. I am not a child to be ruled by a woman!"

He held his huge fist before my face. "With these fingers I will twist your neck! Do you believe it?"

"Yes." I did indeed.

He swung on his heel. "If Moa wants to try and put sense into your head—I hope she does. Bring him to the lounge when you are finished, Moa. Come, Prince—Hahn will need us." He chuckled grimly. "Hahn seems to fear we will plunge into this asteroid like

a wild comet gone suddenly tangent!"

Anita moved aside to let him through the door. I caught a glimpse of her set white face as she followed him down the deck.

Then Moa's bulk blocked the doorway. She faced me.

"Sit where you are, Gregg." She turned and closed the door upon us. "I am not afraid of you. Should I be?"

"No," I said.

She came and sat down beside me. "If you should attempt to leave this room, the stern look-out has orders to bore you through."

"I have no intention of leaving the room." I retorted. "I do not want to commit suicide."

"I thought you did. You seem minded in such a fashion. Gregg, why are you so foolish?"

I REMAINED silent.

"Why?" she demanded.

I said carefully, "This treasure—you are many who will divide it. You have all these men on the *Planetara*. And in Ferrok-Shahn, others, no doubt."

I paused. Would she tell me? Could I make her talk of that other brigand ship which Miko had said was waiting on Mars? I wondered if he had been able to signal it. The distance from here to Mars was great; yet upon other voyages Snap's signals had gotten through. My heart sank at the thought. Our situation here was desperate enough. The passengers soon would be cast upon the asteroid; there would be left only Snap, Anita and myself. We might recapture the ship, but I doubted it now. My thoughts were turning to our arival upon the Moon. We three might, perhaps, be able to thwart the attack upon Grantline, hold the brigands off until help from the Earth might come.

But with another brigand ship, fully manned and armed, coming from Mars, the condition would be immeasurably worse. Grantline had some twenty men, and his camp, I knew, would be reasonably fortified. I knew, too, that Johnny Grantline would fight to his last man.

Moa was saying, "I would like to tell you our plans, Gregg."

Her gaze was on my face. Keen eyes, but they were luminous now—an emotion in them sweeping her. But outwardly she was calm, stern-lipped.

"Well, why don't you tell me?" I said. "If I am to help you. . . ."

"Gregg, I want you with us. Don't you understand? We are not many. My brother and I are guiding this affair. With your help, I would feel differently."

"The ship at Ferrok-Shahn—"

MY fears were realized. She said, "I think our signals reached it. Dean tried, and Coniston was checking him."

"You think the ship is coming?"

"Yes."

"Where will it join us?"

"At the Moon. We will be there in thirty hours. You figures gave that, did they not, Gregg?"

"Yes. And the other ship—how fast is it?"

"Quite fast. In eight days—or nine, perhaps—it will reach the Moon."

She seemed willing enough to talk. There was indeed, no particular reason for reticence; I could not, she naturally felt, turn the knowledge to account.

"Manned—" I prompted.

"About forty men."

"And armed? Long range projectors?"

"You ask very avid questions, Gregg!"

"Why should I not? Don't you suppose I'm interested?" I touched her. "Moa, did it ever occur to you, if once you and Miko trusted me—which you don't—I might show more interest in joining you?"

The look on her face emboldened me. "Did you ever think of that, Moa? And some arrangement for my share of this treasure? I am not like Johnson, to be hired for a hundred pounds of gold-leaf."

"Gregg, I will see that you get your share. Riches, for you—and me."

"I was thinking, Moa, when we land at the Moon to-morrow—where is our equipment?"

The Moon, with its lack of atmosphere, needed special equipment. I had never heard Carter mention what apparatus the *Planetara* was carrying.

MOA laughed. "We have located air-suits and helmets—a variety of suitable apparatus, Gregg. But we were not foolish enough to leave Great-New York on this voyage without our own arrangements. My brother, and Coniston and Prince—all of us shipped crates of freight consigned to Ferrok-Shahn—and Rankin had special baggage marked 'theatrical apparatus.'"

I understood it now. These brigands had boarded the *Planetara* with their own Moon equipment, disguised as freight and personal baggage. Shipped in bond, to be inspected by the tax officials of Mars.

"It is on board now. We will open it when we leave the asteroid, Gregg. We are well equipped."

She bent toward me. And suddenly her long lean fingers were gripping my shoulders.

"Gregg, look at me!"

I gazed into her eyes. There was passion there; and her voice was suddenly intense.

"Gregg, I told you once a Martian girl goes after what she wants. It is you I want—"

Not for me to play like a cad upon a woman's emotions! "Moa, you flatter me."

"I love you." She held me off, gazing at me. "Gregg—"

I must have smiled. And abruptly she released me.

"So you think it amusing?"

"No. But on Earth—"

"We are not on the Earth. Nor am I of the Earth!" She was gauging me keenly. No note of pleading was in her voice; a stern authority; and the passion was swinging to anger.

"I am like my brother: I do not understand you, Gregg Haljan. Perhaps you think you are clever? It seems stupidity, the fatuousness of man!"

"Perhaps," I said.

THERE was a moment of silence. "Gregg, I said I loved you. Have you no answer?"

"No." In truth, I did not know what sort of answer it would be best to make. Whatever she must have read in my eyes, it stirred her to fury. Her fingers with the strength of a man in them, dug into my shoulders. Her gaze searched me.

"You think you love someone else? Is that it?"

That was horribly startling; but she did not mean it just that way. She amended, with caustic venom: "That little Anita Prince! You thought you loved her! Was that it?"

"No!"

But I hardly deceived her. "Sacred to her memory! Her ratlike little face—soft voice like a purring, sniveling cat! Is that what you're remembering, Gregg Haljan?" she sneered.

I tried to laugh. "What nonsense!"

"Is it? Then why are you cold under my touch? Am I—a girl descended from the Martian flame-workers—impotent now to awaken a man?"

A woman scorned! In all the Universe there could be no more dangerous an enemy. An incredible venom shot from her eyes.

"That miserable mouselike creature! Well for her that my brother killed her."

It struck me cold. If Anita was unmasked, beyond all the menace of Miko's wooing, I knew that the venom of Moa's jealousy was a greater danger.

I said sharply, "Don't be simple, Moa!" I shook off her grip. "You imagine too much. You forget that I am a man of the Earth and you a girl of Mars."

"Is that reason why we should not love?"

"No. But our instincts are different. Men of the Earth are born to the chase."

I WAS smiling. With thought of Anita's danger I could find it readily in my heart to dupe this Amazon.

"Give me time, Moa. You attract me."

"You lie!"

"Do you think so?" I gripped her arm with all the power of my fingers. It must have hurt her, but she gave no sign; her gaze clung to me steadily.

"I don't know what to think, Gregg Haljan. . ."

I held my grip. "Think what you like. Men of Earth have been known to kill the thing they love."

"You want me to fear you?"

"Perhaps."

She smiled scornfully. "That is absurd."

I released her. I said earnestly. "I want you to realize that if you treat me fairly, I can be of great advantage to this venture. There will be fighting —I am fearless."

Her venomous expression was softening. "I think that is true, Gregg."

"And you need my navigating skill. Even now I should be in the turret."

I stood up. I half expected she would stop me, but she did not. I added, "Shall we go?"

She stood beside me. Her height brought her face level with mine.

"I think you will cause no more trouble, Gregg?"

"Of course not. I am not wholly witless."

"You have been."

"Well, that is over." I hesitated. Then I added, "A man of Earth does not yield to love when there is work to do. This treasure—"

I think that of everything I said, this last most convinced her.

She interrupted, "That I understand." Her eyes were smoldering. "When it is over—when we are rich—then I will claim you, Gregg."

SHE turned from me. "Are you ready?"

"Yes. No! I must get that sheet of Hahn's last figures."

"Are they checked?"

"Yes." I picked the sheet up from my desk. "Hahn is fairly accurate, Moa."

"A fool nevertheless. An apprehensive fool."

A comradeship seemed coming between us. It was my purpose to establish it.

"Are we going to maroon Dr. Frank with the passengers?" I asked.

"Yes."

"But he may be of use to us." I wanted Dr. Frank kept aboard. I still felt that there was a chance for us to recapture the ship.

But Moa shook her head decisively. "My brother has decided not. We will be well rid of Dr. Frank. Are you ready, Gregg?"

"Yes."

She opened the door. Her gesture reassured the look-out, who was alertly watching the stern watch-tower.

"Come, Gregg."

I stepped out, and followed her forward along the deck, which now was bright with the radiance of the nearby asteroid.

CHAPTER XVIII

Marooned on an Asteroid

A FAIR little world. I had thought so before; and I thought so now as I gazed at the asteroid hanging so close before our bow. A huge, thin crescent, with the Sun off to one side behind it. A silver crescent, tinged with red. From this near viewpoint, all of the little globe's disc was visible. The shadowed portion lay dimly red, mysteriously; the sunlit crescent—widening visibly as we approached—was gleaming silver. Inky moonlike shadows in the hollows, brilliant light upon the mountain heights. The seas lay in gray patches. The convexity of the disc was sharply defined. So small a world! Fair and beautiful, shrouded with clouded areas.

"Where is Miko?"

"In the lounge, Gregg."

"Can we stop there?"

Moa turned into the lounge archway. Strange, tense scene. I saw Anita at once. Her robed figure lurked in an inconspicuous corner; her eyes were upon me as Moa and I entered, but she did not move. The thirty-odd passengers were huddled in a group. Solemn, white-faced men, frightened women. Some of them were sobbing. One Earth-woman—a young widow—sat holding her little girl, and wailing with uncontrolled hysteria. The child knew me. As I appeared now, with my gold-laced white coat over my shoulders, the little child seemed to see in my uniform a mark of authority. She left her mother and ran to me.

"You, please—you will help us? My moms is crying."

I sent her gently back. But there came upon me then a compassion for these innocent passengers, fated to have embarked upon this ill-starred voyage. Herded here in this cabin, with brigands like pirates of old guarding them. Waiting now to be marooned on an uninhabited asteroid roaming in space. A sense of responsibility swept me. I swung upon Miko. He stood with a nonchalant grace, lounging against the wall with a cylinder dangling in his hand. He anticipated me.

"So, Haljan—she put some sense into your head? No more trouble? Then get into the turret. Moa, stay there with him. Send Hahn here. Where is that ass Coniston? We will be in the atmosphere shortly."

I said, "No more trouble from me, Miko. But these passengers—what preparation are you making for them on the asteroid?"

HE stared in surprise. Then he laughed. "I am no murderer. The crew is preparing food, all we can spare. And tools. They can build themselves shelter—they will be picked up in a few weeks."

Dr. Frank was here. I caught his gaze, but he did not speak. On the lounge couches there still lay the quarter-score bodies. Rankin, who had been killed by Blackstone in the fight; a man passenger killed; a woman and a man wounded.

Miko added, "Dr. Frank will take his medical supplies—he will care for the wounded. There are other bodies among the crew." His gesture was deprecating. "I have not buried them. We will put them ashore; easier that way."

The passengers were all eyeing me. I said:

"You have nothing to fear. I will guarantee you the best equipment we can spare. You will give them apparatus with which to signal?" I demanded of Miko.

"Yes. Get to the turret."

I turned away, with Moa after me. Again the little girl ran forward.

"Come—speak to my moms! She is crying."

It was across the cabin from Miko. Coniston had appeared from the deck; it created a slight diversion. He joined Miko.

"Wait," I said to Moa. "She is afraid of you. This is humanity."

I pushed Moa back. I followed the child. I had seen that Venza was sitting with the child's weeping mother. This was a ruse to get word with me.

I stood before the terrified woman while the little girl clung to my legs.

I said gently, "Don't be so frightened. Dr. Frank will take care of you. There is no danger—you will be safer on the asteroid than here on the ship."

I leaned down and touched her shoulder. "There is no danger."

I WAS between Venza and the open cabin. Venza whispered swiftly, "When we are landing, Gregg, I want you to make a commotion—anything—just as the women passengers go ashore."

"Why? No, of course you will have food, Mrs. Francis."

"Never mind! An instant. Just confusion. Go, Gregg—don't speak now!"

I raised the child. "You take care of mother." I kissed her.

From across the cabin Miko's sardonic voice made me turn. "Touching sentimentality, Haljan! Get to your post in the turret!"

His rasping note of annoyance brooked no delay. I set the child down. I said, "I will land us in an hour. Depend on it."

Hahn was at the controls when Moa and I reached the turret.

"You will land us safely, Haljan? he demanded anxiously.

I pushed him away. "Miko wants you in the lounge."

"You take command here?"

"Of course, Hahn. I am no more anxious for a crash than you."

He sighed with relief. "That is true. I am no expert at atmospheric entry, Haljan—nor Coniston, nor Miko."

"Have no fear. Sit down, Moa."

I waved to the look-out in the forward watch-tower, and got his routine gesture. I rang the corridor bells, and the normal signals came promptly back.

"It's correct, Hahn. Get away with you." I called after him. "Tell Miko that things are all right here."

Hahn's small dark figure, lithe as a leopard in his tight fitting trousers and jacket with his robe now discarded, went swiftly down the spider incline and across the deck.

"Moa, where is Snap? By the infernal, if he has been injured!—"

UP on the helio-room bridge the brigand guard still sat. Then I saw that Snap was out there sitting with him. I waved from the turret window, and Snap's cheery gesture answered me. His voice carried down through the silver moonlight: "Land us safely, Gregg. These weird amateur navigators!"

Within the hour I had us dropping into the asteroid's atmosphere. The ship heated steadily. The pressure went up. It kept me busy with the instruments and the calculations. But my signals were always promptly answered from below. The brigand crew did its part efficiently.

At a hundred and fifty thousand feet I shifted the gravity plates to the landing combinations, and started the electronic engines.

"All safe, Gregg?" Moa sat at my elbow; her eyes, with what seemed a glow of admiration in them, followed my busy routine activities.

"Yes. The crew works well."

The electronic streams flowed out like a rocket tail behind us. The *Planetara* caught their impetus. In the rarified air, our bow lifted slightly, like a ship riding a gentle ground swell. At a hundred thousand feet we sailed gently forward, hull down to the asteroid's surface, cruising to seek a landing space.

A little sea was now beneath us. A shadowed sea, deep purple in the night down there. Occasional green-verdured islands showed, with the lines of white surf marking them. Beyond the sea, a curving coastline was visible. Rocky headlines, behind which mountain foothills rose in serrated, verdured ranks. The sunlight edged the distant mountains; and presently this rapidly turning little world brought the sunlight forward.

IT was day beneath us. We slid gently downward. Thirty thousand feet now, above a sparkling blue ocean. The coastline was just ahead; green with a lush, tropical vegetation. Giant trees, huge-leaved. Long dangling vines; air plants, with giant pods and vivid orchid-like blossoms.

I sat at the turret window, staring through my glasses. A fair little world, yet obviously unhabited. I could fancy that all this was newly-sprung vegetation. This asteroid had whirled in from the cold of the interplanetary space far outside our Solar System. A few years ago—as time might be measured astronomically, it was no more than yesterday—this fair landscape was congealed white and bleak with a sweep of glacial ice. But the seeds of life miraculously were here. The miracle of life! Under the warming,

germinating sunlight, the verdure sprung.

"Can you find landing space, Gregg?"

Moa's question brought back my wandering fancies. I saw an upland glade, a level spread of ferns with the forest banked around it. A cliff-height nearby, frowning down at the sea.

"Yes. I can land us there." I shoved her through the glasses. I rang the sirens, and we spiraled, descending further. The mountain tops were now close beneath us. Clouds were overhead, white masses with blue sky behind them. A day of brilliant sunlight. But soon, with our forward cruising, it was night. The Sunlight dropped beneath the sharply convex horizon; the sea and the land went purple.

A night of brilliant stars; the Earth was a blazing blue-red point of light. The heavens visibly were revolving; in an hour or so it would be daylight again.

On the forward deck now Coniston had appeared, commanding half a dozen of the crew. They were carrying up caskets of food and the equipment which was to be given the morooned passengers. And making ready the disembarking incline, loosening the seals of the side-dome windows.

Sternward on the deck, by the lounge oval, I could see Miko standing. And occasionally the roar of his voice at the passengers sounded.

MY vagrant thought flung back into Earth's history. Like this, ancient travelers of the surface of the sea were hearded by pirates to walk the plank, or put ashore, marooned upon some fair desert island of the tropic Spanish main.

Hahn came mounting our turret incline. "All is well, Gregg Haljan?"

"Get to your work," Moa told him sharply. "We land in an hour-quadrant."

He retreated, joining the bustle and confusion which now was beginning on the deck. It struck me—could I turn that confusion to account? Would it be possible, now at the last moment, to attack these brigands? Snap still sat outside the helio-room doorway. But his guard was alert with upraised projector. And that guard, I saw, in his position high amidships, commanded all the deck.

And I saw to, as the passengers now were herded in a line from the lounge oval, that Miko had roped and bound all of the men. And a clanking chain connected them. They came like a line of convicts, marching forward, and stopped on the open deck-space near the base of the turret. Dr. Frank's grim face gazed up at me.

Miko ordered the women and children in a group beside the chained men. His words to them reached me: "You are in no danger. When we land, be careful. You will find gravity very different—this is a very small world."

I flung on the landing lights; the deck glowed with the blue radiance; the search-beams shot down beside our hull. We hung now a thousand feet above the forest glade. I cut off the electronic streams. We poised, with the gravity-plates set at normal, and only a gentle night-breeze to give us a slight side drift. This I could control with the lateral propeller rudders.

For all my busy landing routine, my mind was on other things. Venza's swift words back there in the lounge. I was to create a commotion while the passengers were landing. Why? Had she and Dr. Frank, perhaps, some last minute desperate purposes?

I DETERMINED I would do what she said. Shout, or mis-order the lights. That would be easy. But to what advantage?

I was glad it was night—I had, indeed, calculated our descent so that the landing would be in darkness. But to what purpose? These brigands were very alert. There was nothing I could think of to do which would avail us anything more than a possible swift death under Miko's anger.

"Well done, Gregg!" said Moa.

I cut off the last of the propellers.

With scarcely a perceptible jar, the *Planetara* grounded, rose like a feather and settled to rest in the glade. The deep purple night with stars overhead was around us. I hissed out our interior air through the dome and hull-ports, and admitted the night-air of the astroid. My calculations—of necessity mere mathematical approximations—proved fairly accurate. In temperature and pressure there was no radical change as the dome-windows slid back.

We had landed. Whatever Venza's purpose, her moment was at hand. I was tense. But I was aware also, that beside me Moa was very alert. I had thought her unarmed. She was not. She sat back from me; in her hand was a small thin knife-blade.

She murmured tensely, "You have done your part, Gregg. Well and skillfully done. Now we will sit here quietly and watch them land."

Snap's guard was standing, keenly watching. The look-outs in the forward and stern towers were also armed; I could see them both gazing keenly down at the confusion of the blue-lit deck.

The incline went over the hull-side and touched the ground.

"Enough!" Miko roared. "The men first. Hahn, move the women back! Coniston, pile those caskets to the side. Get out of the way, Prince."

ANITA was down there. I saw her at the edge of the group of women. Venza was near her.

Miko shoved her. "Get out of the way, Prince. You can help Coniston. Have the things ready to throw off."

Five of the steward-crew were at the head of the incline. Miko shouted up at me:

"Haljan, hold our shipboard gravity normal."

"Yes," I responded.

I had done so. Our magnitizers had been adjusted to the shifting calculations of our landing. They were holding now at intensities, so that upon the *Planetara* no change from fairly normal Earth-gravity was apparent. I rang a tentative inquiry signal; the operator in the hull-magnetizer control answered that he was at his post.

The line of men were first to descend. Dr. Frank led them. He flashed a look of farewell up at me and Snap as he went down the incline with the chained men passengers after him.

Motley procession! Twenty odd, dishevelled, half-clothed men of three worlds. The changing, lightening gravity on the incline caught them. Dr. Frank bounded up to the rail under the impetus of his step; caught and held himself, drew himself back. The line swayed. In the dim, blue-lit glare it seemed unreal, crazy. A grotesque dream of men descending a plank.

They reached the forest glade. Stood swaying, afraid at first to move. The purple night crowded them; they stood gazing at this strange world, their new prison.

"Now the women."

Miko was shoving the women to the head of the incline. I could feel Moa's steady gaze upon me. Her knife-blade gleamed in the turret light.

She murmured again, "In a few minutes you can ring us away, Gregg."

I FELT like an actor awaiting his cue in the wings of some turgid drama the plot of which he did not know. Venza was near the head of the incline. Some of the women and children were on it. A woman screamed. Her child had slipped from her hand, bounded up over the rail, and fallen. Hardly fallen—floated down to the ground, with flailing arms and legs, landing in the dark ferns, unharmed. Its terrified wail came up.

There was a confusion on the incline. Venza, still on the deck, seemed to send a look of appeal to the turret. My cue?

I slid my hand to the light switch-board. It was near my knees. I pulled a switch. The blue-lit deck beneath the turret went dark.

I recall an instant of horrible, tense silence, and in the gloom beside me I was aware of Moa moving. I felt a thrill of instinctive fear—would she plunge that knife into me?

The silence of the darkened deck was broken with a confusion of sounds. A babble of voices; a woman passenger's scream; shuffling of feet; and above it all, Miko's roar:

"Stand quiet! Everyone! No movement!"

On the descending incline there was chaos. The disembarking women were clinging to the gang-rail; some of them had evidently surged over it and fallen. Down on the ground in the purple-shadowed starlight I could vaguely see the chained line of men. They too were in confusion, trying to shove themselves toward the fallen women.

Miko roared:

"Light those tubes! Gregg Haljan! By the Almighty, Moa, are you up there? What is wrong? The light-tubes—"

Dark drama of unknown plot! I wonder if I should try and leave the turret. Where was Anita? She had been down there on the deck when I flung out the lights.

I think twenty seconds would have covered it all. I had not moved. I thought, "Is Snap concerned with this?"

Moa's knife could have stabbed me. I felt her lunge against me; and suddenly I was gripping her, twisting her wrist. But she flung the knife away. Her strength was almost the equal of my own. Her hand went for my throat, and with the other hand she was fumbling.

THE deck abruptly sprang into light again. Moa had found the switch and threw it back.

"Gregg!"

She fought me as I tried to reach the switch. I saw down on the deck Miko gazing up at us. Moa panted, "Gregg—stop! If he sees you doing this, he'll kill you—"

The scene down there was almost unchanged. I had answered my cue. To what purpose? I saw Anita near Miko. The last of the women were on the plank.

I had stopped struggling with Moa. She sat back, panting; and then she called: "Sorry, Miko. It will not happen again."

Miko was in a towering rage. But he was too busy to bother with me; his anger swung on those nearest him. He shoved the last of the women violently at the incline. She bounded over. Her body, with the gravity-pull of only a few Earth-pounds, sailed in an arc and dropped to the sward near the swaying line of men.

Mike swung back. "Get out of my way!" A sweep of his huge arm knocked Anita sidewise. "Prince, damn you, help me with those boxes!"

The frightened stewards were lifting the boxes, square metal storage-chests each as long as a man, packed with food, tools, and equipment.

"Here, get out of my way, all of you!"

My breath came again; Anita nimbly retreated before Miko's angry rush. He dashed at the stewards. Three of them held a box. He took it from them; raised it at the top of the incline. Poised it over his head an instant, with his massive arms like gray pillars beneath it. And flung it. The box catapaulted, dropped; and then, passing the Planetara's gravity area, it sailed in a long flat arc over the forest glade and crashed into the purple underbrush.

"Give me another!"

THE stewards pushed another at him. Like an angry Titan, he flung it. And another. One by one the chests sailed out and crashed.

"There is your food—go pick it up! Haljan, make ready to ring us away!"

On the deck lay the dead body of Rance Rankin, which the stewards had carried out. Miko seized it, flung it.

"There! Go to your last resting place!"

And the other bodies. Balch Blackstone, Captain Carter, Johnson—Miko

flung them. And the course masters and those of our crew who had been killed; the stewards appeared with them; Miko unceremoniously cast them off.

The passengers were all on the ground now. It was dim down there. I tried to distinguish Venza, but could not. I could see Dr. Frank's figure at the end of the chained line of men. The passengers were gazing in horror at the bodies hurtling over them.

"Ready, Haljan?"

Moa prompted me. "Tell him yes!"

I called, "Yes!" Had Venza failed in her unknown purpose? It seemed so. On the helio-room bridge Snap and his guard stood like silent statues in the blue-lit gloom.

The disembarkation was over.

"Close the ports," Miko commanded.

The incline came folding up with a clatter. The ports and dome-windows slid closed. Moa hissed against my ear:

"If you want life, Gregg Haljan, you will start your duties!"

Venza had failed. Whatever it was, it had come to nothing. Down in the purple forest, disconnected now from the ship, the last of our friends stood marooned. I could distinguish them through the blur of the closed dome—only a swaying, huddled group was visible. But my fancy pictured this last sight of them—Dr. Frank, Venza, Shac and Dud Ardley.

They were gone. There were left only Snap, Anita, and myself.

I WAS mechanically ringing us away. I heard my sirens sounding down below, with the answering clangs here in the turret. The *Planetara's* respiratory controls started; the pressure equalizers began operating, and the gravity plates shifted into lifting combinations.

The ship was hissing and quivering with it, combined with the grating of the last of the dome ports. And Miko's command:

"Lift, Haljan."

Hahn had been mingled with the confusion of the deck, though I had hardly noticed him; Coniston had remained below, with the crew answering my signals. Hahn stood now with Miko, gazing down through a deck window. Anita was alone at another.

"Lift, Haljan."

I lifted us gently, bow first, with a repulsion of the bow plates. And started the central electronic engine. Its thrust from our stern moved us diagonally over the purple forest trees.

The glade slid downward and away. I caught a last vague glimpse of the huddled group of marooned passengers, staring up at us. Left to their fate, alone on this deserted little world.

With the three engines going we slid smoothly upward. The forest dropped, a purple spread of tree-tops, edged with starlight and Earth-light. The sharply curving horizon seemed following us up. I swung on all the power. We mounted at a forty degree angle, slowly circling, with a bank of clouds over us to the side and the shining little sea beneath.

"Very good, Gregg." In the turret light Moa's eyes blazed at me. "I do not know what you meant by darkening the deck-lights." Her fingers dug at my shoulders. "I will tell my brother it was an error."

I said, "An error—yes."

"An error? I don't know what it was. But you have me to deal with now. You understand? I will tell my brother so. You said, 'On Earth a man may kill the thing he loves.' A woman of Mars may do that! Beware of me, Gregg Haljan."

Her passion-filled eyes bored into me. Love? Hate? The venom of a woman scorned—a mingling of turgid emotions. . . .

I TWISTED away from her grip and ignored her; she sat back, silently watching my busy activities; the calculations of the shifting conditions of gravity, pressures, temperatures; a checking of the score or more of instruments on the board before me.

Mechanical routine. My mind went to Venza, back there on the asteroid. The wandering little world was already shrinking to a convex surface beneath us. Venza, with her last unknown play, gone to failure. Had I failed my cue? Whatever my part, it seemed now that I must have horribly mis-acted it.

The crescent Earth was presently swinging over our bow. We rocketed out of the asteroid's shadow. The glowing, flaming Sun appeared, making a crescent of the Earth. With the glass I could see our tiny Moon, visually seeming to hug the limb of its parent Earth.

We were away upon our course for the Moon. My mind flung ahead. Grantline with his treasure, unsuspecting this brigand ship. And suddenly, beyond all thought of Grantline and his treasure, there came to me a fear for Anita. In God's truth I had been, so far, a very stumbling inept champion—doomed to failure with everything I tried. It swept me, so that I cursed my own incapacity. Why had I not contrived to have Anita desert at the asteroid? Would it not have been far better for her there? Taking her chance for rescue with Dr. Frank, Venza and the others?

But no! I had, like an inept fool, never thought of that! Had left her here on board at the mercy of these outlaws.

And I swore now that, beyond everything, I would protect her.

Futile oath! If I could have seen ahead a few hours! But I sensed the catastrophe. There was a shudder within me as I sat in that turret, docilely guiding us out through the asteroid's atmosphere, heading us upon our course for the Moon.

CHAPTER XIX

In the Zed-light Glow

"TRY again. By the infernal, Snap Dean, if you do anything to balk us!"

Miko scanned the apparatus with keen eyes. How much technical knowledge of signaling instruments did this brigand leader have? I was tense and cold with apprehension as I sat in a corner of the helio-room, watching Snap. Could Miko be fooled? Snap, I knew, was trying to fool him.

The Moon spread close beneath us. My log-chart, computed up to thirty minutes past, showed us barely some thirty thousand miles over the Moon's surface. The globe lay in quadrature beneath our bow quarter—a huge quadrant spreading across the black starry vault of the lower heavens. A silver quadrant. The sunset caught the Lunar mountains, flung slanting shadows over the empty Lunar plains. All the disc was plainly visible. The mellow Earthlight glowed serene and pale to illumine the Lunar night.

The *Planetara* was bathed in silver. A brilliant silver glare swept the forward deck, clean white and splashed with black shadows. We had partly circled the Moon, so as now to approach it from the Earthward side. I had worked with extreme concentration through the last few hours, plotting the trajectory of our curving sweep, setting the gravity plates with constantly shifting combinations. And with it a necessity for the steady retarding of our velocity.

MIKO for a time was at my elbow in the turret. I had not seen Coniston and Hahn of recent hours. I had slept, awakened refreshed, and had a meal. Coniston and Hahn remained below, one or the other of them always with the crew to execute my sirened orders. Then Coniston came to take my place in the turret, and I went with Miko to the helio-room.

"You are skilful, Haljan." A measure of grim approval was in Miko's voice. "You evidently have no wish to try and fool me in this navigation."

I had not, indeed. It is delicate work at best, coping with the intricacies of celestial mechanics upon a semicircular trajectory with retarding ve-

locity, and with a make-shift crew we could easily have come upon real difficulty.

We hung at last, hull-down, facing the Earthward hemisphere of the Lunar disc. The giant ball of the Earth lay behind and above us—the Sun over our stern quarter. With forward velocity almost checked, we poised, and Snap began his signals to the unsuspecting Grantline.

My work momentarily was over. I sat watching the helio-room. Moa was here, close beside me; I felt always her watchful gaze, so that even the play of my expression needed reining.

Miko worked with Snap. Anita too was here. To Miko and Moa it was the somber, taciturn George Prince, shrouded always in his black mourning cloak, disinclined to talk; sitting alone, brooding and cowardly sullen.

Miko repeated, "By the infernal, if you try to fool me, Snap Dean!"

The small metal room, with its grid floor and low-arched ceiling, glared with moonlight through its windows. The moving figures of Snap and Miko were aped by the grotesque, misshapen shadows of them on the walls. Miko gigantic—a great, menacing ogre. Snap small and alert—a trim, pale figure in his tight-fitting white trousers, broad-flowing belt, and white shirt open at the throat. His face was pale and drawn from lack of sleep and the torture to which Miko had subjected him. But he grinned at the brigand's words, and pushed his straggling hair closer under the red eyeshade.

"I'm doing my best, Miko—you can believe it."

THE room over long periods was deadly silent, with Miko and Snap bending watchfully at the crowded banks of instruments. A silence in which my own pounding heart seemed to echo. I did not dare look at Anita, nor she at me. Snap was trying to signal Earth, not the Moon! His main helios were set in the reverse. The infra-red waves, flung from the bow window, were of a frequency which Snap and I believed that Grantline could not pick up. And over against the wall, close beside me and seemingly ignored by Snap, there was a tiny ultra-violet sender. Its faint hum and the quivering of its mirrors had so far passed unnoticed.

Would some Earth-station pick it up? I prayed so. There was a thumb nail mirror here which could bring an answer. I prayed that it might swing.

Would some Earth telescope be able to see us? I doubted it. The pin-point of the *Planetara's* infinitesimal bulk would be beyond them.

Long silences, broken only by the faint hiss and murmur of Snap's instruments.

"Shall I try the 'graphs, Miko?"

"Yes."

I helped him with the spectroheliograph. At every level the plates showed us nothing save the scarred and pitted Moon-surface. We worked for an hour. There was nothing. Bleak cold night on the Moon here beneath us. A touch of fading sunlight upon the Apennines. Up near the South Pole, Tycho with its radiating open rills stood like a grim dark maw.

Miko bent over a plate. "Something here? Is there?"

An abnormality upon the frowning ragged cliffs of Tycho? We thought so. But then it seemed not.

ANOTHER hour. No signal came from Earth. If Snap's calls were getting through we had no evidence of it. Abruptly Miko strode at me from across the room. I went cold and tense; Moa shifted, alert to my every movement. But Miko was not interested in me. A sweep of his clenched fist knocked the ultra-violet sender and its coils and mirrors in a tinkling crash to the grid at my feet.

"We don't need that, whatever it is!"

He rubbed his knuckles where the violet waves had tinged them, and turned grimly back to Snap.

"Where are your Gamma ray mir-

rors? If the treasure is exposed—"

This Martian's knowledge was far greater than we believed. He grinned sardonically at Anita. "If our treasure is on this hemisphere, Prince, we should pick up Gamma rays? Don't you think so? Or is Grantline so cautious it will all be protected?"

Anita spoke in a careful, throaty drawl. "The Gamma rays came plain enough when we passed here on the way out."

"You should know," grinned Miko. "An expert eavesdropper, Prince—I will say that for you. Come Dean, try something else. By God, if Grantline does not signal us, I will be likely to blame you—my patience is shortening. Shall we go closer, Haljan?"

"I don't think it would help," I said.

He nodded. "Perhaps not. Are we checked?"

"Yes." We were poised, very nearly motionless. "If you wish an advance, I can ring it. But we need a surface destination now."

"True, Haljan." He stood thinking. "Would a zed-ray penetrate those crater-cliffs? Tycho, for instance, at this angle?"*

"It might," Snap agreed. "You think he may be on the Northern inner side of Tycho?"

"He may be anywhere," said Miko shortly.

"If you think that," Snap persisted, "suppose we swing the *Planetara* over the South Pole. Tycho, viewed from there—"

"And take another quarter-day of time?" Miko sneered. "Flash on your zed-ray; help him hook it up, Haljan."

I MOVED to the lens-box of the spectroheliograph. It seemed that Snap was very strangely reluctant. Was it because he knew that the Grantline camp lay concealed on the north inner wall of Tycho's giant ring? I thought so. But Snap flashed a queer look at Anita. She did not see it, but I did. And I could not understand it.

My accursed, witless incapacity! If only I had taken warning!

"Here," commanded Miko. "A score of 'graphs with the zed-ray. I tell you I will comb this surface if we have to stay here until our ship comes from Ferrok-Shahn to join us!"

The Martian brigands were coming. Miko's signals had been answered. In ten days the other brigand ship, adequately manned and armed, would be here.

Snap helped me connect the zed-ray. He did not dare even to whisper to me, with Moa hovering always so close. And for all Miko's sardonic smiling, we knew that he would tolerate nothing from us now. He was fully armed, and so was Moa.

I recall that Snap several times tried to touch me significantly. Oh, if only I had taken warning!

We finished our connecting. The dull gray point of zed-ray gleamed through the prisms, to mingle with the moonlight entering the main lens. I stood with the shutter trip.

"The same interval, Snap?"

"Yes."

Beside me, I was aware of a faint reflection of the zed-light—a gray Cathedral shaft crossing the helio-room and falling upon the opposite wall. An unreality there, as the zed-light faintly strove to penetrate the metal room-side.

I said, "Shall I make the exposure?"

SNAP nodded. But that 'graph was never made. An exclamation from Moa made us all turn. The Gamma mirrors were quivering! Grantline had picked our signals! With what undoubtedly was an intensified receiving equipment which Snap had not thought Grantline able to use, he had caught our faint zed-rays, which Snap was sending only to deceive Miko. And Grantline had recognized the *Planetara*, and had released his occulting

* An allusion to the use of the zed-ray light for making spectro-photographs of what might lie behind obscuring rock masses, similar to the old-style X-ray.

screens surrounding the radium ore. The Gamma rays were here, unmistakable!

And upon their heels came Grantline's message. Not in the secret system he had arranged with Snap, but unsuspectingly in open code. I could read the swinging mirror, and so could Miko.

And Miko decoded it triumphantly aloud:

"Surprised but pleased your return. Approach Mid-Northern hemisphere, region of Archimedes, forty thousand toises off nearest Apennine range."*

The message broke off. But even its importance was overshadowed. Miko stood in the center of the helio-room, triumphantly reading the light-indicator. Its beam swung on the scale, which chanced to be almost directly over Anita's head. I saw Miko's expression change. A look of surprise, amazement, came to him.

"Why—"

He gasped. He stood staring. Almost stupidly staring for an instant. And as I regarded him with fascinated horror, there came upon his heavy gray face a look of dawning comprehension. And I heard Snap's startled intake of breath. He moved to the spectroheliograph, where the zed-ray connections were still humming.

But with a leap Miko flung him away. "Off with you! Moa, watch him! Haljan, don't move!"

AGAIN Miko stood staring. Oh dear God, I saw now that he was staring at Anita!

"Why, George Prince! How strange you look!"

Anita did not move. She was stricken with horror; she shrank back against the wall, huddled in her cloak. Miko's sardonic voice came again:

"How strange you look, Prince!" He took a step forward. He was grim and calm. Horribly calm. Deliberate. Gloating—like a great gray monster in human form toying with a fascinated, imprisoned bird.

"Move just a little Prince. Let the zed-ray light fall more fully."

Anita's head was bare. That pale, Hamletlike face. Dear God, the zed-light reflection lay gray and penetrating upon it!

Miko took another step. Peering. Grinning. "How amazing, George Prince! Why, I can hardly believe it!"

Moa was armed with an electronic cylinder. For all her amazement—what turgid emotions sweeping her I can only guess—she never took her eyes from Snap and me.

"Back! Don't move, either of you!" She hissed it at us.

Then Miko leaped at Anita like giant gray leopard pouncing.

"Away with that cloak, Prince!"

I STOOD cold and numbed. And realization came at last. The faint zed-light glow had fallen by chance upon Anita's face. Penetrated the flesh; exposed, faintly glowing, the bone-line of her jaw. Unmasked the waxen art of Glutz.

And Miko had seen it.

"Why George, how surprising! Away with that cloak!"

He seized her wrist, drew her forward, beyond the shaft of zed-light, into the brilliant light of the Moon. And ripped her cloak from her. The gentle curves of her woman's figure were so unmistakable!

And as Miko gazed at them, all his calm triumph swept away.

"Why, Anita!"

I heard Moa mutter: "So that is it?" A venomous flashing look—a shaft from me to Anita and back again. "So that is it?"

"Why, *Anita!*"

Miko's great arms gathered her up as though she were a child. "So I have you back; from the dead delivered back to me!"

"Gregg!" Snap's warning, and his grip over my shoulders brought me a measure of sanity. I had tensed to

* About fifty miles.

spring. I stood quivering, and Moa thrust her weapon against my face. The helio mirrors were swaying again with another message from Grantline. But it came ignored by us all.

In the glare of moonlight by the forward window, Miko held Anita, his great hands pawing her with triumphant possessive caresses.

"So, little Anita, you are given back to me."

Against her futile struggles he held her.

Dead God, if only I had had the wit to have prevented this!

CHAPTER XX

The Grantline Camp

IN the mid-northern hemisphere upon the Earthward side of the Moon, the giant crater of Archimedes stood brooding in silent majesty. Grim, lofty walls, broken, pitted and scarred, rising precipitous to the upper circular rim. Night had just fallen. The sunlight clung to the crater-heights; it tinged with flame the jagged peaks of the Apennine Mountains which rose in tiers at the horizon; and it flung great inky shadows over the intervening lowlands.

Northward, the Mare Imbrium stretched mysterious and purple, its million rills and ridges and crater holes flattened by distance and the gathering darkness into a seeming level surface. The night slowly deepened. The dead-black vault of the sky blazed with its brilliant starry gems. The gibbous Earth hung high above the horizon, motionless, save for the invisible pendulum sway over the tiny arc of its libration; widening to quadrature, casting upon the bleak naked Lunar landscape its mellow Earth-glow.

Slow, measured process, this coming of the Lunar night! For an Earth-day the sunset slowly faded on the Apennines; the poised Earth widened a little further—an Earth-day of time, with the Earth-disc visibly rotating, the faint tracery of its oceans and continents passing in slow, majestic review.

Another Earth-day interval. Then another. And another. Full night now enveloped Archimedes. Splotches of Earth-light and starlight sheen slowly shifted as the night advanced.

Between the great crater and the nearby mountains, the broken, pseudo-level lowlands lay wan in the Earth-light. A few hundred miles, as distance would be measured upon Earth. A million million rills were here. Valleys and ridges, ravines, sharp-walled canyons, cliffs and crags—tiny craters like pock-marks.

Naked, gray porous rock everywhere. This denuded landscape! Cracked and scarred and tumbled, as though some inexorable Titan torch had seared and crumbled and broken it, left it now congealed like a wind-lashed sea abruptly frozen into immobility.

MOONLIGHT upon Earth so gently shines to make romantic a lover's smile! But the reality of the Lunar night is cold beyond human rationality. Cold and darkly silent. Grim desolation. Awesome. Majestic. A frowning majesty that even to the most intrepid human beholder is inconceivably forbidding.

And there were humans here now. On this tumbled plain, between Archimedes and the mountains, one small crater amid the million of its fellows was distinguished this night by the presence of humans. The Grantline camp! It huddled in the deepest purple shadows on the side of a bowl-like pit, a crudely circular orifice with a scant two miles across its rippling rim. There was faint light here to mark the presence of the living intruders. The blue-glow radiance of Morrell tube-lights under a spread of glassite.

The Grantline camp stood mid-way up one of the inner cliff-walls of the little crater. The broken, rock-strewn floor, two miles wide, lay five hundred feet below the camp. Behind it, the jagged precipitous cliff rose another five hundred to the heights of the

upper rim. A broad level shelf hung midway up the cliff, and upon it Grantline had built his little group of glassite dome shelters. Viewed from above there was the darkly purple crater floor, the upflung circular rim where the Earth-light tinged the spires and crags with yellow sheen; and on the shelf, like a huddled group of birds' nests, Grantline's domes clung and gazed down upon the inner valley.

Intricate task, the building of these glassite shelters! There were three. The main one stood close at the brink of the ledge. A quadrangle of glassite walls, a hundred feet in length by half as wide, and a scant ten feet high to its flat-arched dome roof. Built for this purpose in Great-New York, Grantline had brought his aluminite girders and braces and the glassite panels in sections.

THE air here on the Moon surface was negligible—a scant one five-thousandth of the atmospheric pressure at the sea-level on Earth. But within the glassite shelter, a normal Earth-pressure must be maintained. Rigidly braced double walls to withstand the explosive tendency, with no external pressure to counteract it. A tremendous necessity for mechanical equipment had burdened Grantline's small ship to its capacity. The chemistry of manufactured air, the pressure equalizers, renewers, respirators, the lighting and temperature-maintenance systems—all the mechanics of a space-flyer were here.

And within the glassite double walls, there was necessity for a constant circulation of the Erentz temperature insulating system.*

There was this main Grantline building, stretching low and rectangular along the front edge of the ledge. Within it were living rooms, mess-room and kitchen. Fifty feet behind it, connected by a narrow passage of glassite, was a similar, though smaller structure. The mechanical control rooms, with their humming, vibrating mechanisms were here. And an instrument room with signaling apparatus, senders, receivers, mirror-grids and andiphones of several varieties; and an electro-telescope, small but modern, with dome overhead like a little Earth observatory.

From this instrument building, beside the connecting pedestrian passage, wire cables for light, and air-tubes and strings and bundles of instrument wires

* An intricate system of insulation against extremes of temperature, developed by the Erentz Kinetic Energy Corporation in the twenty-first century. Within the hollow double shell of a shelter-wall, or an explorer's helmet-suit, or a space-flyer's hull, an oscillating semi-vacuum current was maintained—an extremely rarified air, magnetically charged, and maintained in rapid oscillating motion. Across this field the outer cold or heat, as the case might be, could penetrate only with slow radiation. This Erentz system gave the most perfect temperature insulation known in its day. Without it, interplanetary flight would have been impossible.

And it served a double purpose. Developed at first for temperature insulation only, the Erentz system surprisingly brought to light one of the most important discoveries made in the realm of physics of the century. It was found that any flashing, oscillating current, whether electronic, or the semi-vacuum of rarified air—or even a thin sheet of whirling fluid—gave also a pressure-insulation. The kinetic energy of the rapid movement was found to absorb within itself the latent energy of the unequal pressure.

(The intricate postulates and mathematical formulae necessary to demonstrate the operation of the physical laws involved would be out of place here.)

The *Planetera* was so equipped, against the explosive tendency of its inner air-pressures when flying in the near-vacuum of space. In the case of Grantline's glassite shelters, the latent energy of his room interior air pressure went largely into a kinetic energy which in practical effect resulted only in the slight acceleration of the vacuum current, and thus never reached the outer wall. The Erents engineers claimed for their system a pressure absorption of 97.4%, leaving, in Grantline's case, only 2.6% of room pressure to be held by the building's aluminite bracers.

It may be interesting to note in this connection that without the Erentz system as a basis, the great sub-sea developments on Earth and Mars of the twenty-first century would also have been impossible. Equipped with a fluid circulation device of the Erents principle within its double hull, the first submarine was able to penetrate the great ocean deeps, withstanding the tremendous ocean pressures at depths of four thousand fathoms.

ran to the main structure—gray snakes upon the porous, gray Lunar rock.

The third building seemed a lean-to banked against the cliff-wall, a slanting shed-wall of glassite fifty fee: high and two hundred in length. Under it, for months Grantline's borers had dug into the cliff. Braced tunnels were here, penetrating back and downward into this vein of radio-active rock.

THE work was over now. The borers had been dismantled and packed away. At one end of the cliff the mining equipment lay piled in a litter. There was a heap of discarded ore where Grantline had carted and dumped it after his first crude refining process had yielded it as waste. The ore-slag lay like gray powder-flakes strewn down the cliff. Tracks and ore-carts along the ledge stood discarded, mute evidence of the weeks and months of work these helmeted miners had undergone, struggling upon this airless, frowning world.

But now all that was finished. The radio-active ore was sufficiently concentrated. It lay—this treasure—in a seventy-foot pile behind the glassite lean-to, with a cage of wires over it and an insulation barrage guarding its Gamma rays from escaping to mark its presence.

The ore-shelter was dark; the other two buildings were lighted. And there were small lights mounted at intervals about the camp and along the edge of the ledge. A spider ladder, with tiny platforms some twenty feet one above the other, hung precariously to the cliff-face. It descended the five hundred feet to the crater floor; and, behind the camp, it mounted the jagged cliff-face to the upper rim-height, where a small observatory platform was placed.

SUCH was the outer aspect of the Grantline Treasure Camp near the beginning of this Lunar night, when, unbeknown to Grantline and his score of men, the *Planetara* with its brigands was approaching. The night was perhaps a sixth advanced. Full night. No breath of cloud to mar the brilliant starry heavens. The quadrant Earth hung poised like a giant mellow moon over Grantline's crater. A bright Earth, yet no air was here on this Lunar surface to spread its light. Only a glow, mingling with the spots of blue tube-light on the poles along the cliff, and the radiance from the lighted buildings.

The crater floor was dimly purple. Beyond the opposite upper rim, from the camp-height, the towering top of distant Archimedes was visible.

No evidence of movement showed about the silent camp. Then a pressure door in an end of the main building opened its tiny series of locks. A bent figure came out. The lock closed. The figure straightened and gazed about the camp. Grotesque, bloated semblance of a man! Helmeted, with rounded dome-hood suggestion of an ancient sea diver, yet goggled and trunked like a gas-masked fighter of the twentieth century war.

He stooped presently and disconnected metal weights which were upon his shoes.*

Then he stood erect again, and with giant strides bounded along the cliff. Fantastic figure in the blue-lit gloom! A child's dream of crags and rocks and strange lights with a single monstrous figure in seven-league boots.

He went the length of the ledge with his twenty-foot strides, inspected the lights, and made adjustments. Came back, and climbed with agile, bounding leaps up the spider ladder to the dome on the crater top. A light flashed on up there. Then it was extinguished.

The goggled, bloated figure came leaping down after a moment. Grantline's exterior watchman making his rounds. He came back to the main

* Within the Grantline buildings it was found more convenient to use a gravity normal to Earth. This was maintained by the wearing of metal-weighted shoes and metal-loaded belt. The Moon-gravity is normally approximately one-sixth the gravity of Earth.

building. Fastened the weights on his shoes. Signaled within.

The lock opened. The figure went inside.

It was early evening, after the dinner hour and before the time of sleep, according to the camp routine Grantline was maintaining. Nine P. M. of Earth Eastern-American time, recorded now upon his Earth chronometer. In the living room of the main building Johnny Grantline sat with a dozen of his men dispersed about the room, whiling away as best they could the lonesome hours.

"ALL as usual. This cursed Moon! When I get home—if ever I do get home—"

"Say your say, Wilks. But you'll spend your share of the gold-leaf and thank your constellations that you had your chance!"

"Let him alone! Come on, Wilks, take a hand here. This game is no good with three."

The man who had been outside flung his hissing helmet recklessly to the floor and unsealed his suit. "Here, get me out of this. No, I won't play. I can't play your cursed game with nothing at stake!"

"Commissioner's orders."

A laugh went up at the sharp look Johnny Grantline flung from where he sat reading in a corner of the room.

"Commander's orders. No gambling gold-leafers tolerated here."

"Play the game, Wilks," Grantline said quietly. "We all know it's infernal doing nothing."

"He's been struck by Earth-light," another man laughed. "Commander, I told you not to let that guy Wilks out at night."

A ROUGH but good-natured lot of men. Jolly and raucous by nature in their leisure hours. But there was too much leisure here now. Their mirth had a hollow sound. In older times, explorers of the frozen polar zones had to cope with inactivity, loneliness and despair. But at least they were on their native world. The grimness of the Moon was eating into the courage of Grantline's men. An unreality here. A weirdness. These fantastic crags. The deadly silence. The nights, almost two weeks of Earth-time in length, congealed by the deadly frigidity of Space. The days of black sky, blazing stars and flaming Sun, with no atmosphere to diffuse the daylight. Days of weird blending sheen of illumination with most of the Sun's heat radiating so swiftly from the naked Lunar surface that the outer temperature still was cold. And day and night, always the familiar beloved Earth-disc hanging poised up near the zenith. From thinnest crescent to full Earth, and then steadily back again to crescent.

All so abnormal, irrational, disturbing to human senses. With the mining work over, an irritability grew upon Grantline's men. And perhaps since the human mind is so wonderful, elusive a thing, there lay upon these men an indefinable sense of impending disaster. Johnny Grantline felt it. He thought about it now as he sat in the room corner watching Wilks being forced into the piquet-game, and he found it strong within him. Unreasonable, ominous depression! Barring the accident which had disabled his little space-ship when they reached this small crater hole, his expedition had gone well. His instruments, and the information he had from the former explorers, had picked up the ore-vein with a scant month of search.

THE vein had now been exhausted; but the treasure was here. Nothing was left but to wait for the *Planetara*. The men were talking of that now.

"She ought to be well mid-way from here to Ferrok-Shahn by now. When do you figure she'll be back here and signal us?"

"Twenty days. Give her another five now to Mars, and five in port. That's

ten. We'll pick her signals in three weeks, mark me."

"Three weeks! Just give me three weeks of reasonable sunrise and sunset! This cursed Moon! You mean, Williams, next daylight."

"Hah! He's inventing a Lunar language. You'll be a Moon-man yet, if you live here long enough."

Olaf Swenson, the big blond fellow from the Scandia fiords, came and flung himself down by Grantline.

"Ay tank they bane without not enough to do, Commander. If the ore yust would not give out—"

"Three weeks—it isn't very long, Ollie."

"No. Maybe not."

From across the room somebody was saying, "If the *Comet* hadn't smashed on us, damn me but I'd ask the Commander to let some of us take her back. The discarded equipment could go."

"Shut up, Billy. She is smashed."

The little *Comet*, cruising in search of the ore, had come to grief just as the ore was found. It lay now on the crater floor with its nose bashed into an upflung spire of rock. Wrecked beyond repair. Save for the pre-arrangement with the *Planetara*, the Grantline party would have been helpless here on the Moon. Knowledge of that—although no one ever suspected but that the *Planetara* would come safely—served to add to the men's depression. They were cut off, virtually helpless on a strange world. Their signalling devices were inadequate even to reach Earth. Grantline's power batteries were running low.* He could not attempt wide-flung signals without jeopardizing the power necessary for the routine of his camp in the event of the *Planetara* being delayed. Nor was his electro-telescope adequate to pick small objects at any great distance.** *

All of Grantline's effort, in truth, had gone into equipment for the finding and gathering of the treasure. The safety of the expedition had to that extent been neglected.

Swenson was mentioning that now.

"You all agreed to it," Johnny said shortly. "Every man here voted that, above everything, what we wanted was to get the radium."

A DYNAMIC little fellow, this Johnny Grantline. Short of temper sometimes, but always just, and a perfect leader of men. In stature he was almost as small as Snap. But he was thick-set, with a smooth shaven, keen-eyed, square-jawed face, and a shock of brown tousled hair. A man of thirty-five, though the decision of his manner, the quiet dominance of his voice, made him seem older. He stood up now, surveying the blue-lit glassite room with its low ceiling close overhead. He was bowlegged; in movement he seemed to roll with a stiff-legged gait like some sea captain of former days on the deck of his swaying ship. Queer-looking figure! Heavy flannel shirt and trousers, boots heavily weighted, and bulky metal-loaded belt strapped about his waist.

He grinned at Swenson. "When we divide this treasure, everyone will be happy, Ollie."

The treasure was estimated by Grantline to be the equivalent of ninety millions in gold-leaf. A hundred and ten millions in the gross as it now stood, with twenty millions to be deducted by the Federated Refiners for reducing it to the standard purity of commercial radium. Ninety millions, with only a million and a half to come off for expedition expenses, and the *Planetara* Company's share another million. A nice little stake.

Grantline strode across the room with his rolling gait.

"Cheer up, boys. Who's winning there? I say, you fellows—"

An audiphone buzzer interrupted him, a call from the duty man in the

*The Gravely storage tanks—the power used by the Grantline expedition—were heavy and bulky affairs. Economy of space on the *Comet* allowed but few of them.

**Electro-telescopes of most modern size and power were too large and used too much power to be available to Grantline.

instrument room of the nearby building.

Grantline clicked the receiver. The room fell into silence. Any call was unusual—nothing ever happened here in the camp.

The duty man's voice sounded over the room.

"Signals coming! Not clear. Will you come over, Commander?"

Signals!

IT was never Grantline's way to enforce needless discipline. He offered no objection when every man in the camp rushed through the connecting passages. They crowded the instrument room where the tense duty man sat bending over his helio receivers. The mirrors were swaying.

The duty man looked up and met Grantline's gaze.

"I ran it up to the highest intensity, Commander. We ought to get it—not let it pass."

"Low scale, Peter?"

"Yes. Weakest infra-red. I'm bringing it up, even though it uses too much of our power." The duty man was apologetic.

"Get it," said Grantline shortly.

"I had a swing a minute ago. I think it's the *Planetara*."

"*Planetara!*" The crowding group of men chorused it. How could it be the *Planetara?*

But it was. The call presently came in clear. Unmistakably the *Planetara*, turned back now from her course to Ferrok-Shahn.

"How far away, Peter?"

The duty man consulted the needles of his dial scale. "Close! Very weak infra-red. But close. Around thirty thousand miles, maybe. It's Snap Dean calling."

The *Planetara* here within thirty thousand miles! Excitement and pleasure swept the room. The *Planetara's* coming had for so long been awaited so eagerly!

The excitement communicated to Grantline. It was unlike him to be incautious; yet now with no thought save that some unforeseen and pleasing circumstance had brought the *Planetara* ahead of time; incautious Grantline certainly was.

"Raise the ore-barrage."

"I'll go! My suit is here."

A WILLING volunteer rushed out to the ore-shed. The Gamma rays, which in the helio-room of the *Planetara* came so unwelcome to Snap and me, were loosed.

"Can you send, Peter?" Grantline demanded.

"Yes, with more power."

"Use it."

Johnny dictated the message of his location which we received. In his incautious excitement he ignored the secret code.

An interval passed. The ore was occulted again. No message had come from us—just Snap's routine signal in the weak infra-red, which we hoped Grantline would not get.

The men crowding Grantline's instrument room waited in tense silence. Then Grantline tried the telescope. Its current weakened the lights with the drain upon the distributors, and cooled the room with a sudden deadly chill as the Erentz insulating system slowed down.

The duty man looked suddenly frightened. "You'll bulge out our walls, Commander. The internal pressure—"

"We'll chance it."

They picked up the image of the *Planetara!* It came from the telescope and shone clear on the grid—the segment of star-field with a tiny cigar-shaped blob. Clear enough to be unmistakable. The *Planetara!* Here now over the Moon, almost directly overhead, poised at what the altimeter scale showed to be a fraction under thirty thousand miles.

The men gazed in awed silence. The *Planetara* coming. . . .

But the altimeter needle was motionless. The *Planetara* was hanging poised.

A sudden gasp went about the room.

The men stood with whitening faces, gazing at the *Planetara's* image. And at the altimeter needle. It was moving. The *Planetara* was descending But not with an orderly swoop.

The image showed the ship clearly. The bow tilted up, then dipped down. But then in a moment it swung up again. The ship turned partly over. Righted itself. Then swayed again, drunkenly.

The watching men were stricken into horrified silence. The *Planetara's* image momentarily, horribly, grew larger. Swaying. Then turning completely over, rotating slowly end over end.

The *Planetara,* out of control, was falling!

CHAPTER XXI

The Wreck of the Planetara

ON the *Planetara,* in the helio-room, Snap and I stood with Moa's weapon upon us. Miko held Anita. Triumphant. Possessive. Then as she struggled, a gentleness came to this strange Martian giant. Perhaps he really loved her. Looking back on it, I sometimes think so.

"Anita, do not fear me." He held her away from him. "I would not harm you. I want your love." Irony came to him. "And I thought I had killed you! But it was only your brother."

He partly turned. I was aware of how alert was his attention. He grinned. "Hold them, Moa—don't let them do anything foolish. So, Anita, you were masquerading to spy upon me? That was wrong of you." He was again ironic.

Anita had not spoken. She held herself tensely away from Miko; she had flashed me a look—just one. What horrible mischance to have brought this catastrophe!

The completion of Grantline's message had come unnoticed by us all.

"Look! Grantline again!" Snap said abruptly.

But the mirrors were steadying. We had no recording-tape apparatus; the rest of the message was lost. The mirrors pulsed and then steadied.

No further message came. There was an interval while Miko waited. He held Anita in the hollow of his great arm.

"Quiet, little bird. Do not fear me. I have work to do, Anita—this is our great adventure. We will be rich, you and I. All the luxuries three worlds can offer, all for us when this is over. Careful, Moa! This Haljan has no wit."

Well could he say it! I, who had been so witless to let this come upon us! Moa's weapon prodded me. Her voice hissed at me with all the venom of a reptile enraged. "So that was your game, Gregg Haljan! And I was so graceless to admit love for you!"

SNAP murmured in my ear, "Don't move, Gregg! She's reckless."

She heard it. She whirled on him. "We have lost George Prince, it seems. Well, we will survive without his ore knowledge. And you, Dean—and this Haljan—mark me, I will kill you both if you cause trouble!"

Miko as gloating. "Don't kill them yet, Moa. What was it Grantline said? Near the crater of Archimedes? Ring us down, Haljan! We'll land."

He signaled the turret. Gave Coniston the Grantline message, and audiphoned it below to Hahn. The news spread about the ship. The bandits were jubilant.

"We'll land now, Haljan. Ring us down. Come, Anita and I will go with you to the turret."

I found my voice. "To what destination?"

"Near Archimedes. The Apennine side. Keep well away from the Grantline camp. We will probably sight it as we descend."

There was no trajectory needed. We were almost over Archimedes now. I could drop us with a visible, instrumental course. My mind was whirling with a confusion of thoughts. What could we do? What could we dare attempt to do? I met Snap's gaze.

"Ring us down, Gregg," he said quietly.

I nodded. I pushed Moa's weapon away. "You don't need that. I obey orders."

WE went to the turret. Moa watched me and Snap, a grim, cold Amazon. She avoided looking at Anita, whom Miko helped down the ladders with a strange mixture of courtierlike grace and amused irony. Coniston gazed at Anita with falling jaw.

"I say! Not George Prince? The girl—"

"No time for argument now," Miko commanded. "It's the girl, masquerading as her brother. Get below, Coniston. Haljan takes us down."

The astounded Englishman continued gazing at Anita. "I mean to say, where to on the Moon? Not to encounter Grantline at once, Miko? Our equipment is not ready."

"Of course not. We will land well away. He won't be suspicious—we can signal him again after we land. We will have time to plan, to assemble the equipment. Get below. I told you."

The reluctant Coniston left us. I took the controls. Miko, still holding Anita as though she were a child, sat beside me. "We will watch him, little Anita. A skilled fellow at this sort of work."

I rang my signals for the shifting of the gravity plates. The answer should have come from below within a second or two. But it did not. Miko regarded me with his great bushy eyebrows upraised.

"Ring again, Haljan."

I duplicated. No answer. The silence was frightening. Ominous.

Miko muttered, "That accursed Hahn! Ring again!"

I sent the imperative emergency demand.

NO answer. A second or two. Then all of us in the turret were startled. Transfixed. From below came a sudden hiss. It sounded in the turret; it came from shifting-room call-grid. The hissing of the pneumatic valves of the plate-shifters in the lower control room. The valves were opening; the plates automatically shifting into neutral, and disconnecting!

An instant of startled silence. Miko may have realized the significance of what had happened. Certainly Snap and I did. The hissing ceased. I gripped the emergency plate-shifter switch which hung over my head. Its disc was dead! The plates were dead in neutral. In the positions they were only placed while in port! And their shifting mechanisms were imperative!

I was on my feet. "Snap! Good God, we're in neutral!"

Miko, if he had not realized it before, was aware if it now. The Moon-disc moved visibly as the *Planetara* lurched. The vault of the heavens was slowly swinging.

Miko ripped out a heavy oath. "Haljan! What is this?"

He stood up, still holding Anita. But there was nothing that he could do in this emergency. "Haljan—what—"

The heavens turned with a giant swoop. The Moon was over us. It swung in dizzying arc. Overhead, then back past our stern; under us, then appearing over our bow.

The *Planetara* had turned over. Upending. Rotating, end over end.

For a moment or two I think all of us in that turret stood and clung. The Moon-disc, the Earth, Sun and all the stars were swinging past our windows. So horribly dizzying. The *Planetara* seemed lurching and tumbling. But it was an optical effect only. I stared with grim determination at my feet. The turret seemed to steady.

Then I looked again. That horrible swoop of all the heavens! And the Moon, as it went past, seemed expanded. We were falling! Out of control, with the Moon-gravity pulling us inexorably down!

"That accursed Hahn—" Miko, stricken with his lack of knowledge of these controls, was wholly confused.

A MOMENT only had passed. My fancy that the Moon-disc was enlarged was merely the horror of my imagination. We had not fallen far enough yet for that.

But we were falling. Unless I could do something, we would crash upon the Lunar surface.

Anita, killed in this *Planetara* turret. The end of everything for us.

Action came to me. I gasped, "Miko, you stay here! The controls are dead! You stay here—hold Anita."

I ignored Moa's weapon which she was still clutching mechanically. Snap thrust her away.

"Sit back! Let us alone! We're falling! Don't you understand?"

This deadly danger, to level us all! No longer were we captors and captured. Not brigands for this moment. No thought of Grantline's treasure! Trapped humans only! Leveled by the common instinct of self-preservation. Trapped here together, fighting for our lives.

Miko gasped, "Can you—check us? What happened?"

"I don't know. I'll try."

I stood clinging. This dizzying whirl! From the audiphone grid Coniston's voice sounded,

"I say, Haljan, something's wrong! Hahn doesn't signal."

The look-out in the forward tower was clinging to his widow. On the deck below our turret a member of the crew appeared, stood lurching for a moment, then shouted, and turned and ran, swaying, aimless. From the lower hull-corridors our grids sounded with the tramping of running steps. Panic among the crew was spreading over the ship. A chaos below decks.

I PULLED at the emergency switch again. Dead. . . .

But down below there was the manual controls.

"Snap, we must get down. The signals."

"Yes."

Coniston's voice came like a scream from the grid. "Hahn is dead—the controls are broken! Hahn is dead!"

We barely heard him. I shouted, "Miko—hold Anita! Come on, Snap!"

We clung to the ladders. Snap was behind me. "Careful, Gregg! Good God!"

This dizzying whirl. I tried not to look. The deck under me was now a blurred kaleidoscope of swinging patches of moonlight and shadow.

We reached the deck. Ran, swaying, lurching.

It seemed that from the turret Anita's voice followed us. "Be careful!"

Within the ship our senses steadied. With the rotating, reeling heavens shut out, there were only the shouts and tramping steps of the panic-stricken crew to mark that anything was amiss. That, and a pseudo-sensation of lurching caused by the pulsing of gravity—a pull when the Moon was beneath our hull to combine its force with our magnetizers; a lightening when it was overhead. A throbbing, pendulum lurch—that was all.

We ran down to the corridor incline. A white-faced member of the crew came running up.

"What's happened? Haljan, what's happened?"

"We're falling!" I gripped him. "Get below. Come on with us!"

But he jerked away from me. "Falling?"

A steward came running. "Falling? My God!"

Snap swung at them. "Get ahead of us! The manual controls—our only chance—we need all you men at the compressor pumps!"

But it was an instinct to try and get on deck, as though here below we were rats caught in a trap. The men tore away from me and ran. Their shouts of panic resounded through the dim, blue-lit corridors.

CONISTON came lurching from the control room. "I say—falling! Haljan, my God, look at him!"

Hahn was sprawled at the gravity-

plate switchboard. Sprawled, head-down. Dead. Killed by something? Or a suicide?

I bent over him. His hands gripped the main switch. He had ripped it loose. And his left hand had reached and broken the fragile line of tubes that intensified the current of the pneumatic plate-shifters. A suicide? With his last frenzy determined to kill us all?

Then I saw that Hahn had been killed! Not a suicide! In his hand he gripped a small segment of black fabric, a piece torn from an invisible cloak? Was it?

The questions were swept away by the necessity for action. Snap was rigging the hand-compressors. If he could get the pressure back in the tanks. . . .

I swung on Coniston. "You armed?"

"Yes." He was white-faced and confused, but not in a panic. He showed me his heat-ray cylinder. "What do you want me to do?"

"Round up the crew. Get all you can. Bring them here to man these pumps."

He dashed away. Snap shouted after him, "Kill them down if they argue!"

Miko's voice sounded from the turret call-grid: "Falling! Haljan, you can see it now! Check us!"

I did not answer that. I pumped with Snap.

Desperate moments. Or was it an hour? Coniston brought the men. He stood over them with menacing weapon.

We had all the pumps going. The pressure rose a little in the tanks. Enough to shift a bow-plate. I tried it. The plate slowly clicked into a new combination. A gravity repulsion just in the bow-tip.

I SIGNALED Miko. "Have we stopped swinging?"

"No. But slower."

I could feel it, that lurch of the gravity. But not steady now. A limp. The tendency of our bow was to stay up.

"More pressure, Snap."

"Yes."

One of the crew rebelled, tried to bolt from the room. "God, we'll crash, caught in here!"

Coniston shot him down.

I shifted another bow-plate. Then two in the stern. The stern-plates seemed to move more readily than the others.

"Run all the stern-plates," Snap advised.

I tried it. The lurching stopped. Miko called. "We're bow down. Falling!"

But not falling free. The Moon-gravity pull upon us was more than half neutralized.

"I'll go up, Snap, and try the engines. You don't mind staying down? Executing my signals?"

"You idiot!" He gripped my shoulders. His eyes were gleaming, his face haggard, but his pale lips twitched with a smile.

"Maybe it's good-by, Gregg. We'll fall—fighting."

"Yes. Fighting. Coniston, you keep the pressure up."

With the broken set-tubes it took nearly all the pressure to maintain the few plates I had shifted. One slipped back to neutral. Then the pumps gained on it, and it shifted again.

I dashed up to the deck. Ah, the Moon was so close now! So horribly close! The deck shadows were still. Through the forward bow windows the Moon surface glared up at us.

I REACHED the turret. The *Planetara* was steady. Pitched bow-down, half falling, half sliding like a rocket downward. The scarred surface of the Moon spread wide under us.

Those last horrible minutes were a blur. And there was always Anita's face. She left Miko. Faced with death, he sat clinging. Ignoring her, Moa, too, sat apart. Staring—

And Anita crept to me. "Gregg, dear one. The end. . . ."

I tried the electronic engines from the stern, setting them in the reverse.

The streams of their light glowed from the stern, forward along our hull, and flared down from our bow toward the Lunar surface. But no atmosphere was here to give resistance. Perhaps the electronic streams checked our fall a little. The pumps gave us pressure, just in the last minutes, to slide a few of the hull-plates. But our bow stayed down. We slid, like a spent rocket falling.

I recall the horror of that expanding Lunar surface. The maw of Archimedes yawning. A blob. Widening to a great pit. Then I saw it was to one side. Rushing upward.

A phantasmagoria of uprushing crags. Black and gray. Spires tinged with Earthlight.

"Gregg, dear one—good-by."

Her gentle arms around me. The end of everything for us. I recall murmuring, "Not falling free, Anita. Some hull-plates are set."

My dials showed another plate shifting, checking us a little further. Good old Snap.

I calculated the next best plate to shift. I tried it. Slid it over. Good old Snap. . .

Then everything faded but the feeling of Anita's arms around me.

"Gregg, dear one—"

The end of everything for us. . . .

There was an up-rush of gray-black rock.

An impact.

CHAPTER XXII

The Hiss of Death

I OPENED my eyes to a dark blur of confusion. My shoulder hurt—a pain shooting through it. Something lay like a weight on me. I could not seem to move my left arm. Very queer! Then I moved it, and it hurt. I was lying twisted; I sat up. And with a rush, memory came. The crash was over. I am not dead. Anita—

She was lying beside me. There was a little light here in this silent blur—a soft, mellow Earth-light filtering in the window. The weight on me was Anita. She lay sprawled, her head and shoulders half way across my lap.

Not dead! Thank God, not dead! She moved. Her arms went around me, and I lifted her. The Earth-light glowed on her pale face; but her eyes opened and she faintly smiled.

"It's past, Anita! We've struck, and we're still alive."

I held her as though all life's turgid danger were powerless to touch us.

But in the silence my floating senses were brought back to reality by a faint sound forcing itself upon me. A little hiss. The faintest murmuring breath like a hiss. Escaping air!

I cast off her clinging arms. "Anita, this is madness!"

FOR minutes we must have been lying there in the heaven of our embrace. But air was escaping! The *Planetara's* dome was broken—or cracked—and our precious air was hissing out.

Full reality came to me at last. I was not seriously injured. I found that I could move freely. I could stand. A twisted shoulder, a limp left arm, but they were better in a moment.

And Anita did not seem to be hurt. Blood was upon her. But not her blood.

Beside Anita, stretched face down on the turret grid, was the giant figure of Miko. The blood lay in a small pool against his face. A widening pool.

Moa was here. I thought her body twitched; then was still. This soundless wreckage! In the dim glow of the wrecked turret with its two motionless, broken human figures, it seemed as though Anita and I were ghouls prowling. I saw that the turret had fallen over to the *Planetara's* deck. It lay dashed against the dome-side.

The deck was aslant. A litter of wreckage. A broken human figure showed—one of the crew, who at the last must have come running up. The forward observation tower was down on the chart-room roof; in its metal tangle I thought I could see the legs of the tower look-out.

So this was the end of the brigands' adventure! The *Planetara's* last voyage! How small and futile are human struggles! Miko's daring enterprise—so villainous, inhuman—brought all in a few moments to this silent tragedy. The *Planetara* had fallen thirty thousand miles. But why? What had happened to Hahn? And where was Coniston, down in this broken hull?

And Snap. I thought suddenly of Snap.

I CLUTCHED at my wandering wits. This inactivity was death. The escaping air hissed in my ears. Our precious air, escaping away into the vacant desolation of the Lunar emptiness. Through one of the twisted, slanting dome-windows a rocky spire was visible. The *Planetara* lay bow-down, wedged in a jagged cradle of Lunar rock. A miracle that the hull and dome had held together.

"Anita, we must get out of here!"

I thought I was fully alert now. I recalled that the brigands had spoken of having partly assembled their Moon equipment. If only we could find suits and helmets!

"We must get out," I repeated. "Get to Grantline's camp."

"Their helmets are in the forward storage room, Gregg. I saw them there."

She was staring at the fallen Miko and Moa. She shuddered and turned away and gripped me. "In the forward storage room, by the port of the emergency lock-exit."

If only the exit locks would operate! We must get out of here, but find Snap first. Good old Snap! Would we find him lying dead?

We climbed from the slanting, fallen turret, over the wreckage of the littered deck. It was not difficult, a lightness was upon us. The *Planetara's* gravity-magnetizers were dead; this was only the light Moon-gravity pulling us.

"Careful, Anita. Don't jump too freely."

We leaped along the deck. The hiss of the escaping pressure was like a clanging gong of warning to tell us to hurry. The hiss of death so close!

"Snap—" I murmured.

"Oh, Gregg, I pray we may find him alive—!"

"And get out. We've got to rush it. Get out and find the Grantline camp."

BUT how far? Which way? I must remember to take food and water. If the helmets were equipped with admission ports. If we could find Snap. If the exit locks would work to let us out.

With a fifteen foot leap we cleared a pile of broken deck chairs. A man lay groaning near them. I went back with a rush. Not Snap! A steward. He had been a brigand, but he was a steward to me now.

"Get up! This is Haljan. Hurry, we must get out of here. The air is escaping!"

But he sank back and lay still. No time to find if I could help him: there were Anita and Snap to save.

We found a broken entrance to one of the descending passages. I flung the debris aside and cleared it. Like a giant of strength with only this Moon-gravity holding me, I raised a broken segment of the superstructure and heaved it back.

Anita and I dropped ourselves down the sloping passage. The interior of the wrecked ship was silent and dim. An occasional passage light was still burning. The passage and all the rooms lay askew. Wreckage everywhere; but the double-dome and hull-shell had withstood the shock. Then I realized that the Erentz system was slowing down. Our heat, like our air, was escaping, radiating away, a deadly chill settling upon everything. And our walls were bulging. The silence and the deadly chill of death would soon be here in these wrecked corridors. The end of the *Planetara*. I wondered vaguely if the walls would explode.

We prowled like ghouls. We did not see Coniston. Snap had been by the shifter-pumps. We found him in the oval doorway. He lay sprawled. Dead? No, he moved. He sat up before we could get to him. He seemed confused, but his senses clarified with the movement of our figures over him.

"Gregg! Why, Anita!"

"Snap! You're all right? We struck —the air is escaping."

HE pushed me away. He tried to stand. "I'm all right. I was up a minute ago. Gregg, it's getting cold. Where is she? I had her here—she wasn't killed. I spoke to her."

Irrational!

"Snap!" I held him, shook him. "Snap, old fellow!"

He said, normally, "Easy, Gregg, I'm all right now."

Anita gripped him. "Who, Snap?"

"She! There she is."

Another figure was here! On the grid-floor by the door oval. A figure partly shrouded in a broken invisible cloak and hood. An invisible cloak! I saw a white face with opened eyes regarding me. The face of a girl.

Venza!

I bent down. "You!"

Anita cried, "Venza!"

Venza here? Why — how — my thoughts swept away. Venza here, dying? Her eyes closed. But she murmured to Anita. "Where is he? I want him."

Dying? I murmured impulsively, "Here I am, Venza dear." Gently, as one would speak with gentle sympathy to humor the dying. "Here I am, Venza."

But it was only the confusion of the shock upon her. And it was upon us all. She pushed at Anita. "I want him." She saw me. This whimsical Venus girl! Even here as we gathered, all of us blurred by the shock, confused in the dim, wrecked ship with the chill of death coming—even here she could make a jest. Her pale lips smiled.

"You, Gregg. I'm not hurt—I don't think I'm hurt." She managed to get herself up on one elbow. "Did you think I wanted you with my dying breath? Why, what conceit! Not you, Handsome Haljan! I was calling Snap."

HE was down to her. "We're all right, Venza. It's over. We must get out of the ship—the air is escaping."

We gathered in the oval doorway. We fought the confusion of panic.

"The exit port is this way."

Or was it? I answered Snap, "Yes, I think so."

The ship suddenly seemed a stranger to me. So cold. So vibrationless. Broken lights. These slanting, wrecked corridors. With the ventilating fans stilled, the air was turning fetid. Chilling. And thinning, with escaping pressure, rarifying so that I could feel the grasp of it in my lungs and the pin-pricks of my burning cheeks.

We started off. Four of us, still alive in this silent ship of death. My blurred thoughts tried to cope with it all. Venza here. I recalled how she had bade me create a diversion when the women passengers were landing on the asteroid. She had carried out her purpose! In the confusion she had not gone ashore. A stowaway here. She had secured the cloak. Prowling, to try and help us, she had come upon Hahn. Had seized his ray-cylinder and struck him down, and been herself knocked unconscious by his dying lunge, which also had broken the tubes and wrecked the *Planetara*. And Venza, unconscious, had been lying here with the mechanism of her cloak still operating, so that we did not see her when we came and found why Hahn did not answer my signals.

"It's here, Gregg."

Snap and I lifted the pile of Moon equipment. We located four suits and helmets and the mechanisms to operate them.

"More are in the chart-room," Anita said.

But we needed no others. I robed

Anita, and showed her the mechanisms.

"Yes. I understand."

SNAP was helping Venza. We were all stiff from the cold; but within the suits and their pulsing currents, the blessed warmth came again.

The helmets had admission ports through which food and drink could be taken. I stood with my helmet ready. Anita, Venza and Snap were bloated and grotesque beside me. We had found food and water here, assembled in portable cases which the brigands had prepared. Snap lifted them, and signed to me he was ready.

My helmet shut out all sounds save my own breathing, my pounding heart, and the murmur of the mechanism. The blessed warmth and pure air were good.

We reached the hull port-locks. They operated! We went through in the light of the head-lamps over our foreheads.

I closed the locks after us. An instinct to keep the air in the ship for the other trapped humans lying there.

We slid down the sloping side of the *Planetara*. We were unweighted, irrationally agile with the slight gravity. I fell a dozen feet and landed with barely a jar.

We were out on the Lunar surface. A great sloping ramp of crags stretched down before us. Gray-black rock tinged with Earth-light. The Earth hung amid the stars in the blackness overhead like a huge section of glowing yellow ball.

THIS grim, desolate, silent landscape! Beyond the ramp, fifty feet below us, a tumbled naked plain stretched away into blurred distance. But I could see mountains off there. Behind us the towering, frowning rampart-wall of Archimedes loomed against the sky.

I had turned to look back at the *Planetara*. She lay broken, wedged between spires of upstanding rock. A few of her lights still gleamed. The end of the *Planetara!*

The three grotesque figures of Anita, Venza and Snap had started off. Hunchback figures with the tanks mounted on their shoulders. I bounded and caught them. I touched Snap. We made audiphone contact.

"Which way do you think?" I demanded.

"I think this way, down the ramp. Away from Archimedes, toward the mountains. It shouldn't be too far."

"You run with Venza. I'll hold Anita."

He nodded. "But we must keep together, Gregg."

We could soon run freely. Down the ramp, out over the tumbled plain. Bounding, grotesque leaping strides. The girls were more agile, more skilful. They were soon leading us. The Earth-shadows of their figures leaped beside them. The *Planetara* faded into the distance behind us. Archimedes stood back there. Ahead, the mountains came closer.

An hour perhaps. I lost count of time. Occasionally we stopped to rest. Were we going toward the Grantline camp? Would they see our tiny waving headlights?

Another interval. Then far ahead of us on the ragged plain, lights showed! Moving tiny spots of light! Headlights on helmeted figures!

We ran, monstrously leaping. A group of figures were off there. Grantline's party? Snap gripped me.

"Grantline! We're safe, Gregg! Safe!"

HE took his bulb-light from his helmet; we stood in a group while he waved it. A semaphone signal.

"Grantline?"

And the answer came. *"Yes. You, Dean?"*

Their personal code. No doubt of this—it was Grantline, who had seen the *Planetara* fall and had come to help us.

I stood then with my hand holding Anita. And I whispered, "It's Grant-

line! We're safe, Anita, my darling!"

Death had been so close! Those horrible last minutes on the *Planetara* had shocked us, marked us.

We stood trembling. And Grantline and his men came bounding up.

A helmeted figure touched me. I saw through the helmet-pane the visage of a stern-faced, square-jawed, youngish man.

"Grantline? Johnny Grantline?"

"Yes," said his voice at my ear-grid. "I'm Grantline. You're Haljan? Gregg Haljan?"

They crowded around us. Gripped us to hear our explanations.

Brigands! It was amazing to Johnny Grantline. But the menace was over now, over as soon as Grantline had realized its existence. As though the wreck of the *Planetara* were foreordained by an all-wise Providence, the brigands' adventure had come to tragedy.

We stood for a time discussing it. Then I drew apart, leaving Snap with Grantline. And Anita joined me. I held her arm so that we had audiphone contact.

"Anita, mine."

"Gregg, dear one."

Murmured nothings which mean so much to lovers!

AS we stood in the fantastic gloom of the Lunar desolation, with the blessed Earth-light on us, I sent up a prayer of thankfulness. Not that a hundred millions of treasure were saved. Not that the attack upon Grantline had been averted. But only that Anita was given back to me. In moments of greatest emotion the human mind individualizes. To me, there was only Anita.

Life is very strange! The gate to the shining garden of our love seemed swinging wide to let us in. Yet I recall that a vague fear still lay on me. A premonition?

I felt a touch on my arm. A bloated helmet visor was thrust near my own. I saw Snap's face peering at me.

"Grantline thinks we should return to the *Planetara*. Might find some of them alive."

Grantline touched me. "It's only humanity."

"Yes," I said.

We went back. Some ten of us—a line of grotesque figures bounding with slow, easy strides over the jagged, rock-strewn plain. Our lights danced before us.

The *Planetara* came at last into view. My ship. Again that pang swept me as I saw her. This, her last resting place. She lay here in her open tomb, shattered, broken, unbreathing. The lights on her were extinguished. The Erentz system had ceased to pulse—the heart of the dying ship, for a while beating faintly, but now at rest.

We left the two girls with some of Grantline's men at the admission port. Snap, Grantline and I, with three others, went inside. There still seemed to be air, but not enough so that we dared remove our helmets.

It was dark inside the wrecked ship. The corridors were black; the hull control-rooms were dimly illumined with Earth-light straggling through the windows.

This littered tomb! Already cold and silent with death. We stumbled over a fallen figure. A member of the crew.

GRANTLINE straightened from examining him.

"Dead."

Earth-light fell on the horrible face. Puffed flesh, bloated red from the blood which had oozed from its pores in the thinning air. I looked away.

We prowled further. Hahn lay dead in the pump-room.

The body of Coniston should have been near here. We did not see it.

We climbed up to the slanting littered deck. The dome had not exploded, but the air up here had almost all hissed away.

Again Grantline touched me. "That the turret?"

"Yes."

No wonder he asked! The wreckage was all so formless.

We climbed after Snap into the broken turret room. We passed the body of that steward who just at the end had appealed to me and I had left dying. The legs of the forward look-out still poked grotesquely up from the wreckage of the observatory tower where it lay smashed down against the roof of the chart-room.

We shoved ourselves into the turret. What was this? No bodies here! The giant Miko was gone! The pool of his blood lay congealed into a frozen dark splotch on the metal grid.

And Moa was gone! They had not been dead. Had dragged themselves out of here, fighting desperately for life. We would find them somewhere around here.

But we did not. Nor Coniston. I recalled what Anita had said: other suits and helmets had been here in the near-by chart-room. The brigands had taken them, and food and water doubtless, and escaped from the ship, following us through the lower admission ports only a few minutes after we had gone out.

WE made careful search of the entire ship. Eight of the bodies which should have been here were missing: Miko, Moa, Coniston, and five of the steward-crew.

We did not find them outside. They were hiding near here, no doubt, more willing to take their chances than to yield now to us. But how, in all this Lunar desolation, could we hope to locate them?

"No use," said Grantline. "Let them go. If they want death—well, they deserve it."

But we were saved. Then, as I stood there, realization leaped at me. Saved? Were we not indeed fatuous fools?

In all these emotion-swept moments since we had encountered Grantline, memory of that brigand ship coming from Mars had never once occurred to Snap or me!

I told Grantline now. His eyes through the visor stared at me blankly.

"What!"

I told him again. It would be here in eight days. Fully manned and armed.

"But Haljan, we have almost no weapons! All my *Comet's* space was taken with mining equipment and the mechanisms for my camp. I can't signal Earth! I was depending on the *Planetara!*"

It surged upon us. The brigand menace past? We were blindly congratulating ourselves on our safety! But it would be eight days or more before in distant Ferrok-Shahn the non-arrival of the *Planetara* would cause any real comment. No one was searching for us—no one was worried over us.

No wonder the crafty Miko was willing to take his chances out here in the Lunar wilds! His ship, his reinforcements, his weapons were coming rapidly!

And we were helpless. Almost unarmed. Marooned here on the Moon with our treasure!

(To be continued.)

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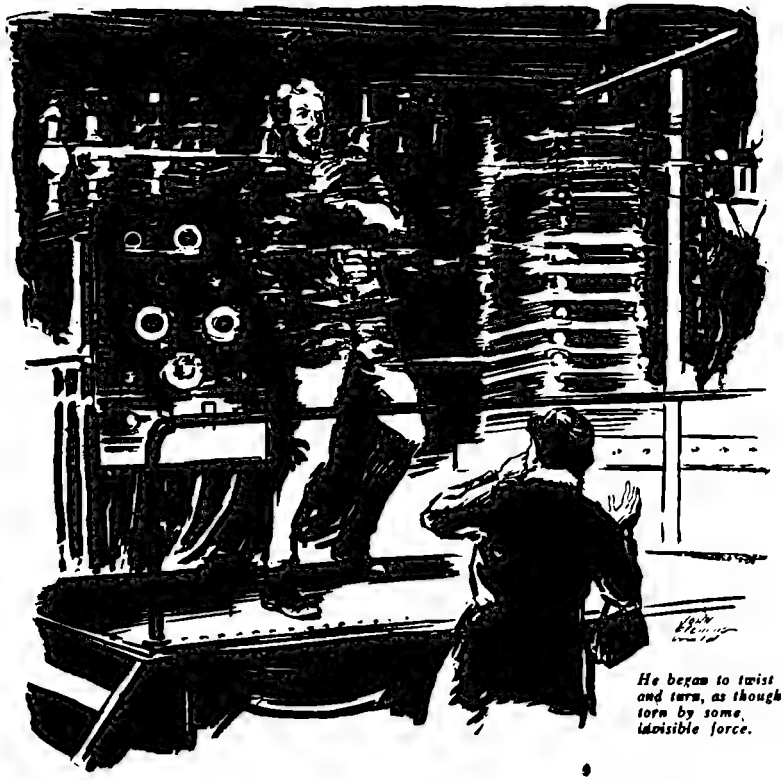

He began to twist and turn, as though torn by some invisible force.

The Soul-Snatcher

By Tom Curry

THE shrill voice of a woman stabbed the steady hum of the many machines in the great, semi-darkened laboratory. It was the onslaught of weak femininity against the ebony shadow of Jared, the silent negro servant of Professor Ramsey Burr. Not many people were able to get to the famous man against his wishes; Jared obeyed orders implicitly and was generally an efficient barrier.

> **From twenty miles away stabbed the "atom-filtering" rays to Allen Baker in his cell in the death house.**

"I will see him, I will," screamed the middle-aged woman. "I'm Mrs. Mary Baker, and he — he — it's his fault my son is going to die. His fault. *Professor! Professor Burr!*"

Jared was unable to keep her quiet.

Coming in from the sunlight, her eyes were not yet accustomed to the strange, subdued haze of the laboratory, an immense chamber crammed full of equipment, the vista of which seemed like an apartment in hell. Bizarre shapes stood out from the mass of impedimenta, great stills which rose full two stories in height, dynamos, immense tubes of colored liquids, a hundred puzzles to the inexpert eye.

The small, plump figure of Mrs. Baker was very out of place in this setting. Her voice was poignant, reedy. A look at her made it evident that she was a conventional, good woman. She had soft, cloudy golden eyes and a pathetic mouth, and she seemed on the point of tears.

"Madam, madam, de doctor is busy," whispered Jared, endeavoring to shoo her out of the laboratory with his polite hands. He was respectful, but firm.

She refused to obey. She stopped when she was within a few feet of the activity in the laboratory, and stared with fear and horror at the center of the room, and at its occupant, Professor Burr, whom she had addressed during her flurried entrance.

The professor's face, as he peered at her, seemed like a disembodied stare, for she could see only eyes behind a mask of lavender gray glass eyeholes, with its flapping ends of dirty, gray-white cloth.

She drew in a deep breath—and gasped, for the pungent fumes, acrid and penetrating, of sulphuric and nitric acids, stabbed her lungs. It was like the breath of hell, to fit the simile, and aptly Professor Burr seemed the devil himself, manipulating the infernal machines.

ACTING swiftly, the tall figure stepped over and threw two switches in a single, sweeping movement. The vermillion light which had lived in a long row of tubes on a nearby bench abruptly ceased to writhe like so many tongues of flame, and the embers of hell died out.

Then the professor flooded the room in harsh gray-green light, and stopped the high-pitched, humming whine of his dynamos. A shadow picture writhing on the wall, projected from a lead-glass barrel, disappeared suddenly, the great color filters and other machines lost their semblance of horrible life, and a regretful sigh seemed to come from the metal creatures as they gave up the ghost.

To the woman, it had been entering the abode of fear. She could not restrain her shudders. But she bravely confronted the tall figure of Professor Burr, as he came forth to greet her.

He was extremely tall and attenuated, with a red, bony mask of a face pointed at the chin by a sharp little goatee. Feathery blond hair, silvered and awry, covered his great head.

"Madam," said Burr in a gentle, disarmingly quiet voice, "your manner of entrance might have cost you your life. Luckily I was able to deflect the rays from your person, else you might not now be able to voice your complaint—for such seems to be your purpose in coming here." He turned to Jared, who was standing close by. "Very well, Jared. You may go. After this, it will be as well to throw the bolts, though in this case I am quite willing to see the visitor."

Jared slid away, leaving the plump little woman to confront the famous scientist.

For a moment, Mrs. Baker stared into the pale gray eyes, the pupils of which seemed black as coal by contrast. Some, his bitter enemies, claimed that Professor Ramsey Burr looked cold and bleak as an iceberg, others that he had a baleful glare. His mouth was grim and determined.

YET, with her woman's eyes, Mrs. Baker, looking at the professor's bony mask of a face, with the high-bridged, intrepid nose, the passionless gray eyes, thought that Ramsey Barr would be handsome, if a little less cadaverous and more human.

"The experiment which you ruined by your untimely entrance," continued the professor, "was not a safe one."

His long white hand waved toward the bunched apparatus, but to her to the room seemed all glittering metal coils of snakelike wire, ruddy copper, dull lead, and tubes of all shapes. Hell cauldrons of unknown chemicals seethed and slowly bubbled, beetle-black bakelite fixtures reflected the hideous light.

"Oh," she cried, clasping her hands as though she addressed him in prayer, "forget your science, Professor Burr, and be a man. Help me. Three days from now my boy, my son, whom I love above all the world, is to die."

"Three days is a long time," said Professor Burr calmly. "Do not lose hope: I have no intention of allowing your son, Allen Baker, to pay the price for a deed of mine. I freely confess it was I who was responsible for the death of—what was the person's name? —Smith, I believe."

"It was you who made Allen get poor Mr. Smith to agree to the experiments which killed him, and which the world blamed on my son," she said. "They called it the deed of a scientific fiend, Professor Burr, and perhaps they are right. But Allen is innocent."

"Be quiet," ordered Burr, raising his hand. "Remember, madam, your son Allen is only a commonplace medical man, and while I taught him a little from my vast store of knowledge, he was ignorant and of much less value to science and humanity than myself. Do you not understand, can you not comprehend, also, that the man Smith was a martyr to science? He was no loss to mankind, and only sentimentalists could have blamed anyone for his death. I should have succeeded in the interchange of atoms which we were working on, and Smith would at this moment be hailed as the first man to travel through space in invisible form, projected on radio waves, had it not been for the fact that the alloy which conducts the three types of sinusoidal failed me and burned out. Yes, it was an error in calculation, and Smith would now be called the Lindbergh of the Atom but for that. Yet Smith has not died in vain, for I have finally corrected this error—science is but trial and correction of error—and all will be well."

"But Allen—Allen must not die at all!" she cried. "For weeks he has been in the death house: it is killing me. The Governor refuses him a pardon, nor will he commute my son's sentence. In three days he is to die in the electric chair, for a crime which you admit you alone are responsible for. Yet you remain in your laboratory, immersed in your experiments, and do nothing, nothing!"

THE tears came now, and she sobbed hysterically. It seemed that she was making an appeal to someone in whom she had only a forlorn hope.

"Nothing?" repeated Burr, pursing his thin lips. "Nothing? Madam, I have done everything. I have, as I have told you, perfected the experiment. It is successful. Your son has not suffered in vain, and Smith's name will go down with the rest of science's martyrs as one who died for the sake of humanity. But if you wish to save your son, you must be calm. You must listen to what I have to say, and you must not fail to carry out my instructions to the letter. I am ready now."

Light, the light of hope, sprang in the mother's eyes. She grasped his arm and stared at him with shining face, through tear-dipped eyelashes.

"Do—do you mean it? Can you save him? After the Governor has refused me? What can you do? No influence will snatch Allen from the jaws of the law: the public is greatly excited and very hostile toward him."

A quiet smile played at the corners of Burr's thin lips.

"Come," he said. "Place this cloak about you. Allen wore it when he assisted me."

The professor replaced his own mask and conducted the woman into the interior of the laboratory.

"I will show you," said Professor Burr.

She saw before her now, on long metal shelves which appeared to be delicately poised on fine scales whose balance was registered by hair-line indicators, two small metal cages.

Professor Burr stepped over to a row of common cages set along the wall. There was a small menagerie there, guinea pigs—the martyrs of the animal kingdom—rabbits, monkeys, and some cats.

THE man of science reached in and dragged out a mewing cat, placing it in the right-hand cage on the strange table. He then obtained a small monkey and put this animal in the left-hand cage, beside the cat. The cat, on the right, squatted on its haunches, mewing in pique and looking up at its tormentor. The monkey, after a quick look around, began to investigate the upper reaches of its new cage.

Over each of the animals was suspended a fine, curious metallic armament. For several minutes, while the woman, puzzled at how this demonstration was to affect the rescue of her condemned son, waited impatiently, the professor deftly worked at the apparatus, connecting wires here and there.

"I am ready now," said Burr. "Watch the two animals carefully."

"Yes, yes," she replied, faintly, for she was half afraid.

The great scientist was stooping over, looking at the balances of the indicators through microscopes.

She saw him reach for his switches, and then a brusk order caused her to turn her eyes back to the animals, the cat in the right-hand cage, the monkey at the left.

Both animals screamed in fear, and a sympathetic chorus sounded from the menagerie, as a long purple spark danced from one gray metal pole to the other, over the cages on the table.

At first, Mrs. Baker noticed no change. The spark had died, the professor's voice, unhurried, grave, broke the silence.

"The first part of the experiment is over," he said. "The ego—"

"Oh, heavens!" cried the woman. "You've driven the poor creatures mad!"

SHE indicated the cat. That animal was clawing at the top bars of its cage, uttering a bizarre, chattering sound, somewhat like a monkey. The cat hung from the bars, swinging itself back and forth as on a trapeze, then reached up and hung by its hind claws.

As for the monkey, it was squatting on the floor of its cage, and it made a strange sound in its throat, almost a mew, and it hissed several times at the professor.

"They are not mad," said Burr. "As I was explaining to you, I have finished the first portion of the experiment. The ego, or personality of one animal has been taken out and put into the other."

She was unable to speak. He had mentioned madness: was he, Professor Ramsey Burr, crazy? It was likely enough. Yet—yet the whole thing, in these surroundings, seemed plausible. As she hesitated about speaking, watching with fascinated eyes the out-of-character behavior of the two beasts, Burr went on.

"The second part follows at once. Now that the two egos have interchanged, I will shift the bodies. When it is completed, the monkey will have taken the place of the cat, and vice versa. Watch."

He was busy for some time with his levers, and the smell of ozone reached Mrs. Baker's nostrils as she stared with horrified eyes at the animals.

She blinked. The sparks crackled madly, the monkey mewed, the cat chattered.

Were her eyes going back on her? She could see neither animal distinctly: they seemed to be shaking in some

cosmic disturbance, and were but blurs. This illusion—for to her, it seemed it must be optical—persisted, grew worse, until the quaking forms of the two unfortunate creatures were like so much ectoplasm in swift motion, ghosts whirling about in a dark room.

Yet she could see the cages quite distinctly, and the table and even the indicators of the scales. She closed her eyes for a moment. The acrid odors penetrated to her lungs, and she coughed, opening her eyes.

NOW she could see clearly again. Yes, she could see a monkey, and it was climbing quite naturally about its cage; it was excited, but a monkey. And the cat, while protesting mightily, acted like a cat.

Then she gasped. Had her mind, in the excitement, betrayed her? She looked at Professor Burr. On his lean face there was a smile of triumph, and he seemed to be awaiting her applause.

She looked again at the two cages. Surely, at first the cat had been in the right-hand cage, and the monkey in the left! And now, the monkey was in the place where the cat had been and the cat had been shifted to the left-hand cage.

"So it was with Smith, when the alloys burned out," said Burr. "It is impossible to extract the ego or dissolve the atoms and translate them into radio waves unless there is a connection with some other ego and body, for in such a case the translated soul and body would have no place to go. Luckily, for you, madam, it was the man Smith who was killed when the alloys failed me. It might have been Allen, for he was the second pole of the connection."

"But," she began faintly, "how can this mad experiment have anything to do with saving my boy?"

He waved impatiently at her evident denseness. "Do you not understand? It is so I will save Allen, your son. I shall first switch our egos, or souls, as you say. Then switch the bodies. It must always take this sequence; why, I have not ascertained. But it always works thus."

Mrs. Baker was terrified. What she had just seen, smacked of the blackest magic—yet a woman in her position must grasp at straws. The world blamed her son for the murder of Smith, a man Professor Burr had made use of as he might a guinea pig, and Allen must be snatched from the death house.

"Do—do you mean you can bring Allen from the prison here—just by throwing those switches?" she asked.

"That is it. But there is more to it than that, for it is not magic, madam; it is science, you understand, and there must be some physical connection. But with your help, that can easily be made."

PROFESSOR RAMSEY BURR, she knew, was the greatest electrical engineer the world had ever known. And he stood high as a physicist. Nothing hindered him in the pursuit of knowledge, they said. He knew no fear, and he lived on an intellectual promontory. He was so great that he almost lost sight of himself. To such a man, nothing was impossible. Hope, wild hope, sprang in Mary Baker's heart, and she grasped the bony hand of the professor and kissed it.

"Oh, I believe, I believe," she cried. "You can do it. You can save Allen. I will do anything, anything you tell me to."

"Very well. You visit your son daily at the death house, do you not?"

She nodded; a shiver of remembrance of that dread spot passed through her.

"Then you will tell him the plan and let him agree to see me the night preceding the electrocution. I will give him final instructions as to the exchange of bodies. When my life spirit, or ego, is confined in your son's body in the death house, Allen will be able to perform the feat of changing the bodies, and your son's flesh will join his soul, which will have been tempo-

rarily inhabiting my own shell. Do you see? When they find me in the cell where they suppose your son to be, they will be unable to explain the phenomenon; they can do nothing but release me. Your son will ge here, and can be whisked away to a safe place of concealment."

"Yes, yes. What am I to do besides this?"

Professor Burr pulled out a drawer near at hand, and from it extracted a folded garment of thin, shiny material.

"This is metal cloth coated with the new alloy," he said, in a matter of fact tone. He rummaged further, saying as he did so, "I expected you would be here to see me, and I have been getting ready for your visit. All is prepared, save a few odds and ends which I can easily clean up in the next two days. Here are four cups which Allen must place under each leg of his bed, and this delicate little director coil you must take especial pains with. It is to be slipped under your son's tongue at the time appointed."

SHE was staring at him still, half in fear, half in wonder, yet she could not feel any doubt of the man's miraculous powers. Somehow, while he talked to her and rested those cold eyes upon her, she was under the spell of the great scientist. Her son, before the trouble into which he had been dragged by the professor, had often hinted at the abilities of Ramsey Burr, given her the idea that his employer was practically a necromancer, yet a magician whose advanced scientific knowledge was correct and explainable in the light of reason.

Yes, Allen had talked to her often when he was at home, resting from his labors with Professor Burr. He had spoken of the new electricity discovered by the famous man, and also told his mother that Burr had found a method of separating atoms and then transforming them into a form of radio-electricity so that they could be sent in radio waves to designated points. And she now remembered—the swift trial and conviction of Allen on the charge of murder had occupied her so deeply that she had forgotten all else for the time being—that her son had informed her quite seriously that Professor Ramsey Burr would soon be able to transport human beings by radio.

"Neither of us will be injured in any way by the change," said Burr calmly. "It is possible for me now to break up human flesh, send the atoms by radio-electricity, and reassemble them in their proper form by these special transformers and atom filters."

Mrs. Baker took all the apparatus presented her by the professor. She ventured the thought that it might be better to perform the experiment at once, instead of waiting until the last minute, but this Professor Burr waved aside as impossible. He needed the extra time, he said, and there was no hurry.

She glanced about the room, and her eye took in the giant switches of copper with their black handles; there were others of a gray-green metal she did not recognize. Many dials and meters, strange to her, confronted the little woman. These things, she felt with a rush of gratitude toward the inanimate objects, would help to save her son, so they interested her and she began to feel kindly toward the great machines.

WOULD Professor Burr be able to save Allen as he claimed? Yes, she thought, he could. She would make Allen consent to the trial of it, even though her son had cursed the scientist and cried he would never speak to Ramsey Burr again.

She was escorted from the home of the professor by Jared, and going out into the bright, sunlit street, blinked as her eyes adjusted themselves to the daylight after the queer light of the laboratory. In a bundle she had a strange suit and the cups: her purse held the tiny coil, wrapped in cotton.

How could she get the authorities to consent to her son having the suit? The cups and the coil she might slip to him herself. She decided that a mother would be allowed to give her son new underwear. Yes, she would say it was that.

She started at once for the prison. Professor Burr's laboratory was but twenty miles from the cell where her son was incarcerated.

As she rode on the train, seeing people in everyday attire, commonplace occurrences going on about her, the spell of Professor Burr faded, and cold reason stared her in the face. Was it nonsense, this idea of transporting bodies through the air, in invisible waves? Yet, she was old-fashioned; the age of miracles had not passed for her. Radio, in which pictures and voices could be sent on wireless waves, was unexplainable to her. Perhaps—

She sighed, and shook her head. It was hard to believe. It was also hard to believe that her son was in deadly peril, condemned to death as a "scientific fiend."

Here was her station. A taxi took her to the prison, and after a talk with the warden, finally she stood there, before the screen through which she could talk to Allen, her son.

"Mother!"

Her heart lifted, melted within her. It was always thus when he spoke. "Allen," she whispered softly.

They were allowed to talk undisturbed.

"Professor Burr wishes to help you," she said, in a low voice.

HER son, Allen Baker, M. D., turned eyes of misery upon her. His ruddy hair was awry. This young man was imaginative and could therefore suffer deeply. He had the gift of turning platitudes into puzzles, and his hazel eyes were lit with an elfin quality, which, if possible, endeared him the more to his mother. All his life he had been the greatest thing in the world to this woman. To see him in such straits tore her very heart. When he had been a little boy, she had been able to make joy appear in those eyes by a word and a pat; now that he was a man, the matter was more difficult, but she had always done her best.

"I cannot allow Professor Burr to do anything for me," he said dully. "It is his fault that I am here."

"But Allen, you must listen, listen carefully. Professor Burr can save you. He says it was all a mistake, the alloy was wrong. He has not come forward before, because he knew he would be able to iron out the trouble if he had time, and thus snatch you from this terrible place."

She put as much confidence into her voice as she could. She must, to enhearten her son. Anything to replace that look of suffering with one of hope. She would believe, she did believe. The bars, the great masses of stone which enclosed her son would be as nothing. He would pass through them, unseen, unheard.

For a time, Allen spoke bitterly of Ramsey Burr, but his mother pleaded with him, telling him it was his only chance, and that the deviltry Allen suspected was imaginary.

"He—he killed Smith in such an experiment," said Allen. "I took the blame, as you know, though I only followed his instructions. But you say he claims to have found the correct alloys?"

"Yes. And this suit, you must put it on. But Professor Burr himself will be here to see you day after to-morrow, the day preceding the—the—" She bit her lip, and got out the dreaded word, "the electrocution. But there won't be any electrocution, Allen; no, there cannot be. You will be safe, safe in my arms." She had to fight now to hold her belief in the miracle which Burr had promised. The solid steel and stone dismayed her brain.

THE new alloy seemed to interest Allen Baker. His mother told him of the exchange of the monkey and the

cat, and he nodded excitedly, growing more and more restive, and his eyes began to shine with hope and curiosity.

"I have told the warden about the suit, saying it was something I made for you myself," she said, in a low voice. "You must pretend the coil and the cups are things you desire for your own amusement. You know, they have allowed you a great deal of latitude, since you are educated and need diversion."

"Yes, yes. There may be some difficulty, but I will overcome that. Tell Burr to come. I'll talk with him and he can instruct me in the final details. It is better than waiting here like a rat in a trap. I have been afraid of going mad, mother, but this buoys me up."

He smiled at her, and her heart sang in the joy of relief.

How did the intervening days pass? Mrs. Baker could not sleep, could scarcely eat, she could do nothing but wait, wait, wait. She watched the meeting of her son and Ramsey Burr, on the day preceding the date set for the execution.

"Well, Baker," said Burr nonchalantly, nodding to his former assistant. "How are you?"

"You see how I am," said Allen, coldly.

"Yes, yes. Well, listen to what I have to say and note it carefully. There must be no slip. You have the suit, the cups and the director coil? You must keep the suit on, the cups go under the legs of the cot you lie on. The director under your tongue."

The professor spoke further with Allen, instructing him in scientific terms which the woman scarcely comprehended.

"To-night, then at eleven-thirty," said Burr, finally. "Be ready."

ALLEN nodded. Mrs. Baker accompanied Burr from the prison.

"You—you will let me be with you?" she begged.

"It is hardly necessary," said the professor.

"But I must. I must see Allen the moment he is free, to make sure sure he is all right. Then, I want to be able to take him away. I have a place in which we can hide, and as soon as he is rescued he must be taken out of sight."

"Very well," said Burr, shrugging. "It is immaterial to me, so long as you do not interfere with the course of the experiment. You must sit perfectly still, you must not speak until Allen stands before you and addresses you."

"Yes, I will obey you," she promised.

Mrs. Baker watched Professor Ramsey Burr eat his supper. Burr himself was not in the least perturbed; it was wonderful, she thought, that he could be so calm. To her, it was the great moment, the moment when her son would be saved from the jaws of death.

Jared carried a comfortable chair into the laboratory and she sat in it, quiet as a mouse, in one corner of the room.

It was nine o'clock, and Professor Burr was busy with his preparations. She knew he had been working steadily for the past few days. She gripped the arms of her chair, and her heart burned within her.

The professor was making sure of his apparatus. He tested this bulb and that, and carefully inspected the curious oscillating platform, over which was suspended a thickly bunched group of gray-green wire, which was seemingly an antenna. The numerous indicators and implements seemed to be satisfactory, for at quarter after eleven, Burr gave an exclamation of pleasure and nodded to himself.

Burr seemed to have forgotten the woman. He spoke aloud occasionally, but not to her, as he drew forth a suit made of the same metal cloth as Allen must have on at this moment.

THE tension was terrific, terrific for the mother, who was awaiting the culmination of the experiment which would rescue her son from the electric chair—or would it fail? She

shuddered. What if Burr were mad?

But look at him, she was sure he was sane, as sane as she was.

"He will succeed," she murmured, digging her nails into the palms of her hands. "I *know* he will."

She pushed aside the picture of what would happen on the morrow, but a few hours distant, when Allen, her son, was due to be led to a legal death in the electric chair.

Professor Burr placed the shiny suit upon his lank form, and she saw him put a duplicate coil, the same sort of small machine which Allen possessed, under his tongue.

The Mephistophelian figure consulted a matter-of-fact watch; at that moment, Mrs. Baker heard, above the hum of the myriad machines in the laboratory, the slow chiming of a clock. It was the moment set for the deed.

Then, she feared the professor was insane, for he suddenly leaped to the high bench of the table on which stood one of the oscillating platforms.

Wires led out from this, and Burr sat gently upon it, a strange figure in the subdued light.

Professor Burr, however, she soon saw, was not insane. No, this was part of it. He was reaching for switches near at hand, and bulbs began to glow with unpleasant light, needles on indicators swung madly, and at last, Professor Burr kicked over a giant switch, which seemed to be the final movement.

For several seconds the professor did not move. Then his body grew rigid, and he twisted a few times. His face, though not drawn in pain, yet twitched galvanically, as though actuated by slight jabs of electricity.

THE many tubes fluoresced, flared up in pulsing waves of violet and pink: there were gray bars of invisibility or areas of air in which nothing visible showed. There came the faint, crackling hum of machinery rather like a swarm of wasps in anger. Blue and gray thread of fire spat across the antenna. The odor of ozone came to Mrs. Baker's nostrils, and the acid odors burned her lungs.

She was staring at him, staring at the professor's face. She half rose from her chair, and uttered a little cry.

The eyes had changed, no longer were they cold, impersonal, the eyes of a man who prided himself on the fact that he kept his arteries soft and his heart hard; they were loving, soft eyes.

"Allen," she cried.

Yes, without doubt, the eyes of her son were looking at her out of the body of Professor Ramsey Burr.

"Mother," he said gently. "Don't be alarmed. It is successful. I am here, in Professor Burr's body."

"Yes," she cried, hysterically.

It was too weird to believe. It seemed dim to her, unearthly.

"Are you all right, darling?" she asked timidly.

"Yes. I felt nothing beyond a momentary giddy spell, a bit of nausea and mental stiffness. It was strange, and I have a slight headache. However, all is well."

He grinned at her, laughed with the voice which was not his, yet which she recognized as directed by her son's spirit. The laugh was cracked and unlike Allen's whole-hearted mirth, yet she smiled in sympathy.

"Yes, the first part is a success," said the man. "Our egos have interchanged. Soon, our bodies will undergo the transformation, and then I must keep under cover. I dislike Burr—yet he is a great man. He has saved me. I suppose the slight headache which I feel is one bequeathed me by Burr. I hope he inherits my shivers and terrors and the neuralgia for the time being, so he will get some idea of what I have undergone."

He had got down from the oscillating platform, the spirit of her son in Ramsey's body.

"What—what are you doing now?" she asked.

"I must carry out the rest of it myself," he said. "Burr directed me when we talked yesterday. It is more dif-

ficult when one subject is out of the laboratory, and the tubes must be checked."

HE went carefully about his work, and she saw him replacing four of the tubes with others, new ones, which were ready at hand. Though it was the body of Ramsey Burr, the movements were different from the slow, precise work of the professor, and more and more, she realized that her son inhabited the shell before her.

For a moment, the mother thought of attempting to dissuade her son from making the final change; was it not better thus, than to chance the disintegration of the bodies? Suppose something went wrong, and the exchange did not take place, and her son, that is, his spirit, went back to the death house?

Midnight struck as he worked feverishly at the apparatus, the long face corrugated as he checked the dials and tubes. He worked swiftly, but evidently was following a procedure which he had committed to memory, for he was forced to pause often to make sure of himself.

"Everything is O.K.," said the strange voice at last. He consulted his watch. "Twelve-thirty," he said.

She bit her lip in terror, as he cried, "Now!" and sprang to the table to take his place on the metallic platform, which oscillated to and fro under his weight. The delicate grayish metal antenna, which, she knew, would form a glittering halo of blue and gray threads of fire, rested quiescent above his head.

"This is the last thing," he said calmly, as he reached for the big ebony handled switch. "I'll be myself in a few minutes, mother."

"Yes, son, yes."

The switch connected, and Allen Baker, in the form of Ramsey Burr, suddenly cried out in pain. His mother leaped up to run to his side, but he waved her away. She stood, wringing her hands, as he began to twist and turn, as though torn by some inviaible force. Eery screams came from the throat of the man on the platform, and Mrs. Baker's cries of sympathy mingled with them.

THE mighty motors hummed in a high-pitched, unnatural whine, and suddenly Mrs. Baker saw the tortured face before her grow dim. The countenance of the professor seemed to melt, and then there came a dull, muffled thud, a burst of white-blue flame, the odor of burning rubber and the tinkle of broken glass.

Back to the face came the clarity of outline, and still it was Professor Ramsey Burr's body she stared at.

Her son, in the professor's shape, climbed from the platform, and looked about him as though dazed. An acrid smoke filled the room, and burning insulation assailed the nostrils.

Desperately, without looking at her, his lips set in a determined line, the man went hurriedly over the apparatus again.

"Have I forgotten, did I do anything wrong?" she heard his anguished cry.

Two tubes were burned out, and these he replaced as swiftly as possible. But he was forced to go all over the wiring, and cut out whatever had been short-circuited so that it could be hooked up anew with uninjured wire.

Before he was ready to resume his seat on the platform, after half an hour of feverish haste, a knock came on the door.

The person outside was imperative, and Mrs. Baker ran over and opened the portal. Jared, the whites of his eyes shining in the dim light, stood there. "De professah—tell him dat de wahden wishes to talk with him. It is very important, ma'am."

The body of Burr, inhabited by Allen's soul, pushed by her, and she followed falteringly, wringing her hands. She saw the tall figure snatch at the receiver and listen.

"Oh, God," he cried.

At last, he put the receiver back on

the hook, automatically, and sank down in a chair, his face in his hands.

MRS. BAKER went to him quickly. "What is it, Allen?" she cried.

"Mother," he said hoarsely, "it was the warden of the prison. He told me that Allen Baker had gone temporarily insane, and claimed to be Professor Ramsey Burr in my body."

"But—but what is the matter?" she asked. "Cannot you finish the experiment, Allen? Can't you change the two bodies now?"

He shook his head. "Mother—they electrocuted Ramsey Burr in my body at twelve forty-five to-night!"

She screamed. She was faint, but she controlled herself with a great effort.

"But the electrocution was not to be until morning," she said.

Allen shook his head. "They are allowed a certain latitude, about twelve hours," he said. "Burr protested up to the last moment, and begged for time."

"Then—then they must have come for him and dragged him forth to die in the electric chair while you were attempting the second part of the change," she said.

"Yes. That was why it failed. That's why the tubes and wires burned out and why we couldn't exchange bodies. It began to succeed, then I could feel something terrible had happened. It was impossible to complete the Beta circuit, which short-circuited. They took him from the cell, do you see, while I was starting the exchange of the atoms."

FOR a time, the mother and her boy sat staring at one another. She saw the tall, eccentric figure of Ramsey Burr before her, yet she saw also the soul of her son within that form. The eyes were Allen's, the voice was soft and loving, and his spirit was with her.

"Come, Allen, my son," she said softly.

"Burr paid the price," said Allen, shaking his head. "He became a martyr to science."

The world has wondered why Professor Ramsey Burr, so much in the headlines as a great scientist, suddenly gave up all his experiments and took up the practice of medicine...

Now that the public furor and indignation over the death of the man Smith has died down, sentimentalists believe that Ramsey Burr has reformed and changed his icy nature, for he manifests great affection and care for Mrs. Mary Baker, the mother of the electrocuted man who had been his assistant.

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"That's the one," he exclaimed. "Hold the glass there for a moment."

A KNOCK sounded at the door of Dr. Bird's private laboratory in the Bureau of Standards. The famous scientist paid no attention to the interruption but bent his head lower over the spectroscope with which he was working. The knock was repeated with a quality of quiet insistence upon recognition. The Doctor smothered an exclamation of impatience and strode over to the door and threw it open to the knocker.

Dr. Bird uncovers a dastardly plot, amazing in its mechanical ingenuity, behind the apparently trivial eye trouble of the President.

"Oh, hello, Carnes," he exclaimed as he recognized his visitor. "Come in and sit down and

keep your mouth shut for a few minutes. I am busy just now but I'll be at liberty in a little while."

"There's no hurry, Doctor," replied Operative Carnes of the United States Secret Service as he entered the room and sat on the edge of the Doctor's desk. "I haven't got a case up my sleeve this time; I just came in for a little chat."

"All right, glad to see you. Read that latest volume of the *Zeitschrift* for a while. That article of Von Beyer's has got me guessing, all right."

Carnes picked up the indicated volume and settled himself to read. The Doctor bent over his apparatus. Time and again he made minute adjustments and gave vent to muttered exclamations of annoyance at the results he obtained. Half an hour later he rose from his chair with a sigh and turned to his visitor.

"What do you think of Von Beyer's alleged discovery?" he asked the operative.

"IT'S too deep for me, Doctor," replied the operative. "All that I can make out of it is that he claims to have discovered a new element named 'lunium,' but hasn't been able to isolate it yet. Is there anything remarkable about that? It seems to me that I have read of other new elements being discovered from time to time."

"There is nothing remarkable about the discovery of a new element by the spectroscopic method," replied Dr. Bird. "We know from Mendelejeff's table that there are a number of elements which we have not discovered as yet, and several of the ones we know were first detected by the spectroscope. The thing which puzzles me is that so brilliant a man as Von Beyer claims to have discovered it in the spectra of the moon. His name, lunium, is taken from Luna, the moon."

"Why not the moon? Haven't several elements been first discovered in the spectra of stars?"

"Certainly. The classic example is Lockyer's discovery of an orange line in the spectra of the sun in 1868. No known terrestrial element gave such a line and he named the new element which he deduced helium, from Helos, the sun. The element helium was first isolated by Ramsey some twenty-seven years later. Other elements have been found in the spectra of stars, but the point I am making is that the sun and the stars are incandescent bodies and could be logically expected to show the characteristic lines of their constituent elements in their spectra. But the moon is a cold body without an atmosphere and is visible only by reflected light. The element, lunium, may exist in the moon, but the manifestations which Von Beyer has observed must be, not from the moon, but from the source of the reflected light which he spectro-analyzed.

"YOU are over my depth, Doctor." "I'm over my own. I have tried to follow Von Beyer's reasoning and I have tried to check his findings. Twice this evening I thought that I caught a momentary glimpse on the screen of my fluoroscope of the ultra-violet line which he reports as characteristic of lunium, but I am not certain. I haven't been able to photograph it yet. He notes in his article that the line seems to be quite impermanent and fades so rapidly that an accurate measurement of its wave-length is almost impossible. However, let's drop the subject. How do you like your new assignment?"

"Oh, it's all right. I would rather be back on my old work."

"I haven't seen you since you were assigned to the Presidential detail. I suppose that you fellows are pretty busy getting ready for Premier McDougal's visit?"

"I doubt if he will come," replied Carnes soberly. "Things are not exactly propitious for a visit of that sort just now."

DR. BIRD sat back in his chair in surprise.

"I thought that the whole thing is arranged. The press seems to think so, at any rate."

"Everything is arranged, but arrangements may be cancelled. I wouldn't be surprised to hear that they were."

"Carnes," replied Dr. Bird gravely, "you have either said too much or too little. There is something more to this than appears on the surface. If it is none of my business, don't hesitate to tell me so and I'll forget what you have said, but if I can help you any, speak up."

Carnes puffed meditatively at his pipe for a few minutes before replying.

"It's really none of your business, Doctor," he said at length, "and yet I know that a corpse is a chatterbox compared to you when you are told anything in confidence, and I really need to unload my mind. It has been kept from the press so far; but I don't know how long it can be kept muzzled. In

strict confidence, the President of the United States acts as though he were crazy."

"Quite a section of the press has claimed that for a long time," replied Dr. Bird, with a twinkle in his eye.

"I don't mean crazy in that way, Doctor, I mean *really* crazy. Bugs! Nuts! Bats in his belfry!"

DR. BIRD whistled softly.

"Are you sure, Carnes?" he asked.

"As sure as may be. Both of his physicians think so. They were noncommittal for a while, especially as the first attack waned and he seemed to recover, but when his second attack came on more violently than the first and the President began to act queerly, they had to take the Presidential detail into their confidence. He has been quietly examined by some of the greatest psychiatrists in the country, but none of them have ventured on a positive verdict as to the nature of the malady. They admit, of course, that it exists, but they won't classify it. The fact that it is intermittent seems to have them stopped. He was bad a month ago but he recovered and became, to all appearances, normal for a time. About a week ago he began to show queer symptoms again and now he is getting worse daily. If he goes on getting worse for another week, it will have to be announced so that the Vice-President can take over the duties of the head of the government."

"WHAT are the symptoms?"

"The first we noticed was a failing of his memory. Coupled with this was a restlessness and a habit of nocturnal prowling. He tosses continually on his bed and mutters and at times leaps up and rages back and forth in his bedchamber, howling and raging. Then he will calm down and compose himself and go to sleep, only to wake in half an hour and go through the same performance. It is pretty ghastly for the men on night guard."

"How does he act in the daytime?"

"Heavy and lethargic. His memory becomes a complete blank at times and he talks wildly. Those are the times we must guard against."

"Overwork?" queried the Doctor.

"Not according to his physicians. His physical health is splendid and his appetite unusually keen. He takes his exercise regularly and suffers no ill health except for a little eye trouble."

Dr. Bird leaped to his feet.

"Tell me more about this eye trouble, Carnes," he demanded.

"Why, I don't know much about it, Doctor. Admiral Clay told me that it was nothing but a mild opthalmia which should yield readily to treatment. That was when he told me to see that the shades of the President's study were partially drawn to keep the direct sunlight out."

"OPTHALMIA be sugared! What do his eyes look like?"

"They are rather red and swollen and a little bloodshot. He has a tendency to shut them while he is talking, and he avoids light as much as possible. I hadn't noticed anything peculiar about it."

"Carnes, did you ever see a case of snow bindness?"

The operative looked up in surprise.

"Yes, I have. I had it myself once, in Maine. Now that you mention it, his case does look like snow blindness, but such a thing is absurd in Washington in August."

Dr. Bird rummaged in his desk and drew out a book, which he consulted for a moment.

"Now, Carnes," he said, "I want some dates from you and I want them accurately. Don't guess, for a great deal may depend on the accuracy of your answers. When was this mental disability on the part of the President first noticed?"

Carnes drew a pocket diary from his coat and consulted it.

"The seventeenth of July," he replied. "That is, we are sure, in view

of later developments, that that was the date it first came on. We didn't realize that anything was wrong until the twentieth. On the night of the nineteenth the President slept very poorly, getting up and creating a disturbance twice, and on the twentieth he acted so queerly that it was necessary to cancel three conferences."

DR. BIRD checked off the dates on the book before him and nodded.

"Go on," he said, "and describe the progress of the malady by days."

"It got progressively worse until the night of the twenty-third. The twenty-fourth he was no worse, and on the twenty-fifth a slight improvement was noticed. He got steadily better until, by the third or fourth of August, he was apparently normal. About the twelfth he began to show signs of restlessness which have increased daily during the past week. Last night, the nineteenth, he slept only a few minutes and Brady, who was on guard, says that his howls were terrible. His memory has been almost a total blank today and all of his appointments were cancelled, ostensibly because of his eye trouble. If he gets any worse, it probably will be necessary to inform the country as to his true condition."

When Carnes had finished, Dr. Bird sat for a time in concentrated thought.

"You did exactly right in coming to me, Carnes," he said presently. "I don't think that this is a job for a doctor at all—I believe that it needs a physicist and a chemist and possibly a detective to cure him. We'll get busy."

"What do you mean, Doctor?" demanded Carnes. "Do you think that some exterior force is causing the President's disability?"

"I THINK nothing, Carnes," replied the Doctor grimly, "but I intend to know something before I am through. Don't ask for explanations: this is not the time for talk, it is the time for action. Can you get me into the White House to-night?"

"I doubt it, Doctor, but I'll try. What excuse shall I give? I am not supposed to have told you anything about the President's illness."

"Get Bolton, your chief, on the phone and tell him that you have talked to me when you shouldn't have. He'll blow up, but after he is through exploding, tell him that I smell a rat and that I want him down here at once with *carte blanche* authority to do as I see fit in the White House. If he makes any fuss about it, remind him of the fact that he has considered me crazy several times in the past when events showed that I was right. If he won't play after that, let me talk to him."

"All right, Doctor," replied Carnes as he picked up the scientist's telephone and gave the number of the home of the Chief of the Secret Service. "I'll try to bully him out of it. He has a good deal of confidence in your ability."

HALF an hour later the door of Dr. Bird's laboratory opened suddenly to admit Bolton.

"Hello, Doctor," exclaimed the Chief, "what the dickens have you got on your mind now? I ought to skin Carnes alive for talking out of turn, but if you really have an idea, I'll forgive him. What do you suspect?"

"I suspect several things, Bolton, but I haven't time to tell you what they are. I want to get quietly into the White House as promptly as possible."

"That's easy," replied Bolton, "but first I want to know what the object of the visit is."

"The object is to see what I can find out. My ideas are entirely too nebulous to attempt to lay them out before you just now. You've never worked directly with me on a case before, but Carnes can tell you that I have my own methods of working and that I won't spill my ideas until I have something more definite to go on than I have at present."

"The Doctor is right, Chief," said

Carnes. "He has an idea all right, but wild horses won't drag it out of him until he's ready to talk. You'll have to take him on faith, as I always do."

Bolton hesitated a moment and then shrugged his shoulders.

"Have it your own way, Doctor," he said. "Your reputation, both as a scientist and as an unraveller of tangled skeins, is too good for me to boggle about your methods. Tell me what you want and I'll try to get it."

"I WANT to get into the White House without undue prominence being given to my movements and listen outside the President's door for a short time. Later I will want to examine his sleeping quarters carefully and to make a few tests. I may be entirely wrong in my assumptions, but I believe that there is something there that requires my attention."

"Come along," said Bolton. "I'll get you in and let you listen, but the rest we'll have to trust to luck on. You may have to wait until morning."

"We'll cross that bridge when we get to it," replied the Doctor. "I'll get a little stuff together that we may need."

In a few moments he had packed some apparatus in a bag and, taking up it and an instrument case, he followed Bolton and Carnes down the stairs and out onto the grounds of the Bureau of Standards.

"It's a beautiful moon, isn't it?" he observed.

Carnes assented absently to the Doctor's remark, but Bolton paid no attention to the luminous disc overhead, which was flooding the landscape with its mellow light.

"My car is waiting," he announced.

"All right, old man, but stop for a moment and admire this moon," protested the Doctor. "Have you ever seen a finer one?"

"Come on and let the moon alone," snorted Bolton.

"My dear man, I absolutely refuse to move a step until you pause in your headlong devotion to duty and pay the homage due to Lady Luna. Don't you realize, you benighted Christian, that you are gazing upon what has been held to be a deity, or at least the visible manifestation of deity, for ages immemorial? Haven't you ever had time to study the history of the moon-worshipping cults? They are as old as mankind, you know. The worship of Isis was really only an exalted type of moon worship. The crescent moon, you may remember, was one of her most sacred emblems."

BOLTON paused and looked at the Doctor suspiciously.

"What are you doing—pulling my leg?" he demanded.

"Not at all, my dear fellow. Carnes, doesn't the sight of the glowing orb of night influence you to pious meditation upon the frailty of human life and the insignificance of human ambition?"

"Not to any very great degree," replied Carnes dryly.

"Carnesy, old dear, I fear that you are a crass materialist. I am beginning to despair of ever inculcating in you any respect for the finer and subtler things of life. I must try Bolton. Bolton, have you ever seen a finer moon? Remember that I won't move a step until you have carefully considered the matter and fully answered my question."

Bolton looked first at the Doctor, then at Carnes, and finally he looked reluctantly at the moon.

"It's a fine one," he admitted, "but all full moons look large on clear nights at this time of the year."

"Then you *have* studied the moon?" cried Dr. Bird with delight. "I was sure—"

HE broke off his speech suddenly and listened. From a distance came the mournful howl of a dog. It was answered in a moment by another howl from a different direction. Dog after dog took up the chorus until the air was filled with the melancholy wailing of the animals.

"See, Bolton," remarked the Doctor, "even the dogs feel the chastening influence of the Lady of Night and repent of the sins of their youth and the follies of their manhood, or should one say doghood? Come along, I feel that the call of duty must tear us away from the contemplation of the beauties of nature."

He led the way to Bolton's car and got in without further words. A half-hour later, Bolton led the way into the White House. A word to the secret service operative on guard at the door admitted him and his party, and he led the way to the newly constructed solarium where the President slept. An operative stood outside the door.

"What word, Brady?" asked Bolton in a whisper.

"He seems worse, sir. I doubt if he has slept at all. Admiral Clay has been in several times, but he didn't do much good. There, listen! The President is getting up again."

FROM behind the closed door which confronted them came sounds of a person rising from a bed and pacing the floor, slowly at first, and then more and more rapidly, until it was almost a run. A series of groans came to the watchers and then a long drawn out howl. Bolton shuddered.

"Poor devil!" he muttered.

Dr. Bird shot a quick glance around.

"Where is Admiral Clay?" he asked.

"He is sleeping upstairs. Shall I call him?"

"No. Take me to his room."

The President's naval physician opened the door in response to Bolton's knock.

"Is he worse?" he demanded anxiously.

"I don't think so, Admiral," replied Bolton. "I want to introduce you to Dr. Bird of the Bureau of Standards. He wants to talk with you about the case."

"I am honored, Doctor," said the physician as he grasped the scientist's outstretched hand. "Come in. Pardon my appearance, but I was startled out of a doze when you knocked. Have a chair and tell me how I can serve you."

Dr. Bird drew a notebook from his pocket.

"I have received certain dates in connection with the President's malady from Operative Carnes," he said, "and I wish you to verify them."

"Pardon me a moment, Doctor," interrupted the Admiral, "but may I ask what is your connection with the matter? I was not aware that you were a physician or surgeon."

"DR. BIRD is here by the authority of the secret service," replied Bolton. "He has no connection with the medical treatment of the President, but permit me to remind you that the secret service is responsible for the safety of the President and so have a right to demand such details about him as are necessary for his proper protection."

"I have no intention in obstructing you in the proper performance of your duties, Mr. Bolton," began the Admiral stiffly.

"Pardon me, Admiral," broke in Dr. Bird, "it seems to me that we are getting started wrong. I suspect that certain exterior forces are more or less concerned in this case and I have communicated my suspicions to Mr. Bolton. He in turn brought me here in order to request from you your cooperation in the matter. We have no idea of demanding anything and are really seeking help which we believe that you can give us."

"Pardon me, Admiral," said Bolton. "I had no intention of angering you."

"I am at your service, gentlemen," replied Admiral Clay. "What information did you wish, Doctor?"

"At first merely a verification of the history of the case as I have it."

DR. BIRD read the notes he had taken down from Carnes, and the Admiral nodded agreement.

"Those dates are correct," he said.

"Now, Admiral, there are two further points on which I wish enlightenment. The first is the opthalmia which is troubling the patient."

"It is nothing to be alarmed about as far as symptoms go, Doctor," replied the Admiral. "It is a rather mild case of irritation, somewhat analogous to granuloma, but rather stubborn. He had an attack several weeks ago and while it did not yield to treatment as readily as I could have wished, it did clear up nicely in a couple of weeks and I was quite surprised at this recurrent attack. His sight is in no danger."

"Have you tried to connect this opthalmia with his mental aberrations?"

"Why no, Doctor, there is no connection."

"Are you sure?"

"I am certain. The slight pain which his eyes give him could never have such an effect upon the mind of so able and energetic a man as he is."

"Well, we'll let that pass for the moment. The other question is this: has he any form of skin trouble?"

THE Admiral looked up in surprise.

"Yes, he has," he admitted. "I had mentioned it to no one, for it really amounts to nothing, but he has a slight attack of some obscure form of dermatitis which I am treating. It is affecting only his face and hands."

"Please describe it."

"It has taken the form of a brown pigmentation on the hands. On the face it causes a slight itching and subsequent peeling of the affected areas."

"In other words, it is acting like sunburn?"

"Why, yes, somewhat. It is not that, however, for he has been exposed to the sun very little lately, on account of his eyes."

"I notice that he is sleeping in the new solarium which was added last winter to the executive mansion. Can you tell me with what type of glass it is equipped?"

"Yes. It is not equipped with glass at all, but with fused quartz."

"When did he start to sleep there?"

"As soon as it was completed."

"And all the time the windows have been of fused quartz?"

"No. They were glazed at first, but the glass was removed and the fused quartz substituted at my suggestion about two months ago, just before this trouble started."

"Thank you, Admiral. You have given me several things to think about. My ideas are a little too nebulous to share as yet but I think that I can give you one piece of very sound advice. The President is spending a very restless night. If you would remove him from the solarium and get him to lie down in a room which is glazed with ordinary glass, and pull down the shades so that he will be in the dark, I think that he will pass a better night."

ADMIRAL CLAY looked keenly into the piercing black eyes of the Doctor.

"I know something of you by reputation, Bird," he said slowly, "and I will follow your advice. Will you tell me why you make this particular suggestion?"

"So that I can work in that solarium to-night without interruption," replied Dr. Bird. "I have some tests which I wish to carry out while it is still dark. If my results are negative, forget what I have told you. If they yield any information, I will be glad to share it with you at the proper time. Now get the President out of that solarium and tell me when the coast is clear."

The Admiral donned a dressing gown and stepped out of the room. He returned in fifteen minutes.

"The solarium is at your disposal, Doctor," he announced. "Shall I accompany you?"

"If you wish," assented Dr. Bird as he picked up his apparatus and strode out of the room.

In the solarium he glanced quickly around, noting the position of each of the articles of furniture.

"I presume that the President always sleeps with his head in this direction?" he remarked, pointing to the pillow on the disturbed bed.

The Admiral nodded assent. Dr. Bird opened the bag which he had packed in his laboratory, took out a sheet of cardboard covered with a metallic looking substance, and placed it on the pillow. He stepped back and donned a pair of smoked glasses, watching it intently. Without a word he took off the glasses and handed them to the Admiral. The Admiral donned them and looked at the pillow. As he did so an exclamation broke from his lips.

"That plate seems to glow," he said in an astonished voice.

DR. BIRD stepped forward and laid his hand on the pillow. He was wearing a wrist watch with a radiolite dial. The substance suddenly increased its luminescence and began to glow fiercely, long luminous streamers seeming to come from the dial. The Doctor took away his hand and substituted a bottle of liquid for the plate on the pillow. Immediately the bottle began to glow with a phosphorescent light.

"What on earth is it?" gasped Carnes.

"Excitation of a radioactive fluid," replied the Doctor. "The question is, what is exciting it. Somebody get a stepladder."

While Bolton was gone after the ladder, the Doctor took from his bag what looked like an ordinary pane of glass.

"Take this, Carnes," he directed, "and start holding it over each of those panes of quartz which you can reach. Stop when I tell you to."

THE operative held the glass over each of the panes in succession, but the Doctor, who kept his eyes covered with the smoked glasses and fastened on the plate which he had replaced on the pillow, said nothing. When Bolton arrived with the ladder, the process went on. One end and most of the front of the solarium had been covered before an exclamation from the Doctor halted the work.

"That's the one," he exclaimed. "Hold the glass there for a moment."

Hurriedly he removed the plate from the pillow and replaced the phial of liquid. There was only a very feeble glow.

"Good enough," he cried. "Take away the glass, but mark that pane, and be ready to replace it when I give the word."

From the instrument case he had brought he took out a spectroscope. He turned back the mattress and mounted it on the bedstead.

"Cover that pane," he directed.

Carnes did so, and the Doctor swung the receiving tube of the instrument until it pointed at the covered pane. He glanced into the eyepiece, and then held a tiny flashlight for an instant opposite the third tube.

"Uncover that pane," he said.

Carnes took down the glass plate and the Doctor gazed into the instrument. He made some adjustments.

"Are you familiar with spectroscopy, Admiral?" he asked.

"Somewhat."

"Take a squint in here and tell me what you see."

THE Admiral applied his eye to the instrument and looked long and earnestly.

"There are some lines there, Doctor," he said, "but your instrument is badly out of adjustment. They are in what should be the ultra-violet sector, according to your scale."

"I forgot to tell you that this is a fluoroscopic spectroscope designed for the detection of ultra-violet lines," replied Dr. Bird. "Those lines you see are ultra-violet, made visible to the eye by activation of a radioactive compound whose rays in turn impinge on

a zinc blende sheet. Do you recognize the lines?"

"No, I don't."

"Small wonder; I doubt whether there are a dozen people who would. I have never seen them before, although I recognize them from descriptions I have read. Bolton, come here. Sight along this instrument and through that plate of glass which Carnes is holding and tell me what office that window belongs to."

Bolton sighted as directed up at the side of the State, War and Navy Building.

"I can't tell exactly at this time of night, Doctor," he said, "but I'll go into the building and find out."

"Do so. Have you a flashlight?"

"Yes."

"Flash it momentarily out of each of the suspected windows in turn until you get an answering flash from here. When you do, flash it out of each pane of glass in the window until you get another flash from here. Then come back and tell me what office it is. Mark the pane so that we can locate it again in the morning."

"IT is the office of the Assistant to the Adjutant General of the Army," reported Bolton ten minutes later.

"What is there in the room?"

"Nothing but the usual desks and chairs."

"I suspected as much. The window is merely a reflector. That is all that we can do for to-night, gentlemen. Admiral, keep your patient quiet and in a room with *glass* windows, preferably with the shades drawn, until further notice. Bolton, meet me here with Carnes at sunrise. Have a picked detail of ten men standing by where we can get hold of them in a hurry. In the mean time, get the Chief of Air Service out of bed and have him order a plane at Langley Field to be ready to take off at 6 A. M. He is not to take off, however, until I give him orders to do so. Do you understand?"

"Everything will be ready for you, Doctor, but I confess that I don't know what it is all about."

"It's the biggest case you ever tackled, old man, and I hope that we can pull it off successfully. I'd like to go over it with you now, but I'll be busy at the Bureau for the rest of the night. Drop me off there, will you?"

At sunrise the next morning, Bolton met Dr. Bird at the entrance to the White House grounds.

"Where is your detail?" he asked.

"In the State, War and Navy Building."

"Good. I want to go to the solarium, put a light on the place where the President's pillow was last night, and mark that pane of quartz we were looking through. Then we'll join the detail."

DR. BIRD placed the light and walked with Carnes across the White House grounds. Bolton's badge secured admission to the State, War and Navy Building for the party and they made their way to the office of the Assistant to the Adjutant General.

"Did you mark the pane of glass through which you flashed your light last night, Bolton?" asked the Doctor.

The detective touched one of the panes.

"Good," exclaimed the Doctor. "I notice that this window has hooks for a window washer's belt. Get a life belt, will you?"

When the belt was brought, the Doctor turned to Carnes.

"Carnes," he said, "hook on this life saver and climb out on the window ledge. Take this piece of apparatus with you."

He handed Carnes a piece of apparatus which looked like two telescopes fastened to a base, with a screw adjustment for altering the angles of the barrels.

CARNES took it and looked at it inquiringly.

"That is what I was making at the

Bureau last night," explained Dr. Bird. "It is a device which will enable me to locate the source of the beam which was reflected from this pane of glass onto the President's pillow. I'll show you how to work it. You know that when light is reflected the angle of reflection always equals the angle of incidence? Well, you place these three feet against the pane of glass, thus putting the base of the instrument in a plane parallel to the pane of glass. By turning these two knobs, one of which gives lateral and the other vertical adjustment, you will manipulate the instrument until the first telescope is pointing directly toward the President's pillow. Now notice that the two telescope barrels are fastened together and are connected to the knobs, so that when the knobs are turned, the scopes are turned in equal and opposite amounts. When one is turned from its present position five degrees to the west, the other automatically turns five degrees to the east. When one is elevated, the other is correspondingly depressed. Thus, when the first tube points toward the pillow, the other will point toward the source of the reflected beam."

"Clever!" ejaculated Bolton.

"It is rather crude and may not be accurate enough to locate the source exactly, but at least it will give us a pretty good idea of where to look. Given time, a much more accurate instrument could have been made, but two telescopic rifle sights and a theodolite base were all the materials I could find to work with. Climb out, Carnesy, and do your stuff."

CARNES climbed out on the window and fastened the hooks of the life saver to the rings set in the window casings. He sat the base of the instrument against the pane of glass and manipulated the telescope knobs as Dr. Bird signalled from the inside. The scientist was hard to please with the adjustment, but at last the cross hairs of the first telescope were centered on the light in the solarium. He changed his position and stared through the second tube.

"The angle is too acute and the distance too great for accuracy," he said with an air of disappointment. "The beam comes from the roof of a house down along Pennsylvania Avenue, but I can't tell from here which one it is. Take a look, Bolton."

The Chief of the Secret Service stared through the telescope.

"I couldn't be sure, Doctor," he replied. "I can see something on the roof of one of the houses, but I can't tell what it is and I couldn't tell the house when I got in front of it."

"It won't do to make a false move," said the Doctor. "Did you arrange for that plane?"

"It is waiting your orders at the field, Doctor."

"Good. I'll go up to the office of the Chief of Air Service and get in touch with the pilot over the Chief's private line. There are some orders that I wish to give him and some signals to be arranged."

DR. BIRD returned in a few minutes.

"The plane is taking off now and will be over the city soon," he announced. "We'll take a stroll down the Avenue until we are in the vicinity of the house, and then wait for the plane. Carnes will take five of your men and go down behind the house and the rest of us will go in front. Which building do you think it is, Bolton?"

"About the fourth from the corner."

"All right, the men going down the back will take station behind the house next to the corner and the rest of us will get in front of the same building. When the plane comes over, watch it. If you receive no signal, go to the next house and wait for him to make a loop and come over you again. Continue this until the pilot throws a white parachute over. That is the signal that we are covering the right house. When

you get that signal, Carnes, leave two men outside and break in with the other three. Get that apparatus on the roof and the men who are operating it. Bolton and I will attack the front door at the same time. Does everybody understand?"

Murmurs of assent came from the detail.

"All right, let's go. Carnes, lead out with your men and go half a block ahead so that the two parties will arrive in position at about the same time."

CARNES left the building with five of the operatives. Dr. Bird and Bolton waited for a few minutes and then started down Pennsylvania Avenue, the five men of their squad following at intervals. For three-quarters of a mile they sauntered down the street.

"This should be it, Doctor," said Bolton.

"I think so, and here comes our plane."

They watched the swift scout plane from Langley Field swing down low over the house and then swoop up into the sky again without making a signal. The party walked down the street one house and paused. Again the plane swept over them without sign. As they stopped in front of the next house a white parachute flew from the cockpit of the plane and the aircraft, its mission accomplished, veered off to the south toward its hangar.

"This is the place," cried Bolton. "Haggerty and Johnson, you two cover the street. Bemis, take the lower door. The rest come with me."

FOLLOWED closely by Dr. Bird and two operatives, Bolton sprinted across the street and up the steps leading to the main entrance of the house. The door was barred, and he hurled his weight against it without result.

"One side, Bolton," snapped Dr. Bird.

The diminutive Chief drew aside and Dr. Bird's two hundred pounds of bone and muscle crashed against the door. The lock gave and the Doctor barely saved himself from sprawling headlong on the hall floor. A woman's scream rang out, and the Doctor swore under his breath.

"Upstairs! To the roof!" he cried.

Followed by the rest of the party, he sprinted up the stairway which opened before him. Just as he reached the top his way was barred by an Amazonian figure in a green bathrobe.

"Who th' divil arre yez?" demanded an outraged voice.

"Police," snapped Bolton. "One side!"

"Wan side, is it?" demanded the fiery haired Amazon. "The divil a stip ye go until ye till me ye'er bizness. Phwat th' divil arre yez doin' in th' house uv a rayspictable female at this hour uv th' marnin'?"

"One side, I tell you!" cried Bolton as he strove to push past the figure that barred the way.

"Oh, ye wud, wud yez, little mann?" demanded the Irishwoman as she grasped Bolton by the collar and shook him as a terrier does a rat. Dr. Bird stifled his laughter with difficulty and seized her by the arm. With a heave on Bolton's collar she raised him from the ground and swung him against the Doctor, knocking him off his feet.

"Hilp! P'lice! Murther!" she screamed at the top of her voice.

"Damn it, woman, we're on—"

DR. BIRD'S voice was cut short by the sound of a pistol shot from the roof, followed by two others. The Irishwoman dropped Bolton and slumped into a sitting position and screamed lustily. Bolton and Dr. Bird, with the two operatives at their heels, raced for the roof. Before they reached it another volley of shots rang out, these sounding from the rear of the building. They made their way to the upper floor and found a ladder running to a skylight in the roof. At the foot of the ladder stood one of Carnes' party.

"What is it, Williams?" demanded Bolton.

"I don't know, Chief. Carnes and the other two went up there, and then I heard shooting. My orders were to let no one come down the ladder."

As he spoke, Carnes' head appeared at the skylight.

"It's the right place, all right, Doctor," he called. "Come on up, the shooting is all over."

DR. BIRD mounted the ladder and stepped out on the roof. Set on one edge was a large piece of apparatus, toward which the scientist eagerly hastened. He bent over it for a few moments and then straightened up.

"Where is the operator?" he asked.

Carnes silently led the way to the edge of the roof and pointed down. Dr. Bird leaned over. At the foot of the fire escape he saw a crumpled dark heap, with a secret service operative bending over it.

"Is he dead, Olmstead?" called Carnes.

"Dead as a mackerel," came the reply. "Richards got him through the head on his first shot."

"Good business," said Dr. Bird. "We probably could never have secured a conviction and the matter is best hushed up anyway. Bolton, have two of your men help me get this apparatus up to the Bureau. I want to examine it a little. Have the body taken to the morgue and shut up the press. Find out which room the chap occupied and search it, and bring all his papers to me. From a criminal standpoint, this case is settled, but I want to look into the scientific end of it a little more."

"I'd like to know what it was all about, Doctor," protested Bolton. "I have followed your lead blindly, and now I have a housebreaking without search-warrant and a killing to explain, and still I am about as much in the dark as I was at the beginning."

"Excuse me, Bolton," said Dr. Bird contritely; "I didn't mean to slight you. Admiral Clay wants to know about it and so does Carnes, although he knows me too well to say so. As soon as I have digested the case I'll let you know and I'll go over the whole thing with you."

A WEEK later Dr. Bird sat in conference with the President in the executive office of the White House. Beside him sat Admiral Clay, Carnes and Bolton.

"I have told the President as much as I know, Doctor," said the Admiral, "and he would like to hear the details from your lips. He has fully recovered from his malady and there is no danger of exciting him."

"I cannot read Russian," said Dr. Bird slowly, "and so was forced to depend on one of my assistants to translate the papers which Mr. Bolton found in Stokowsky's room. There is nothing in them to definitely connect him with the Russian Union of Soviet Republics, but there is little doubt in my mind that he was a Red agent and that Russia supplied the money which he spent. It would be disastrous to Russia's plans to have too close an accord between this country and the British Empire, and I have no doubt that the coming visit of Premier McDougal was the underlying cause of the attempt. So much for the reason.

"As to how I came to suspect what was happening, the explanation is very simple. When Carnes first told me of your malady, Mr. President, I happened to be checking Von Beyer's results in the alleged discovery of a new element, lunium. In the article describing his experiments, Von Beyer mentions that when he tried to observe the spectra, he encountered a mild form of opthalmia which was quite stubborn to treatment. He also mentions a peculiar mental unbalance and intense exhilaration which the rays seemed to cause both in himself and in his assistants. The analogy between his observations and your case struck me at once.

"FOR ages the moon has been an object of worship by various religious sects, and some of the most obscene orgies of which we have record occurred in the moonlight. The full moon seems to affect dogs to a state of partial hypnosis with consequent howling and evident pain in the eyes. Certain feeble minded persons have been known to be adversely affected by moonlight as well as some cases of complete mental aberation. In other words, while moonlight has no practical effect on the normal human in its usual concentration, it does have an adverse effect on certain types of mentality and, despite the laughter of medical science, there seems to be something in the theory of 'moon madness.' This effect Von Beyer attributed to the emanations of lunium, which element he detected in the spectra of the moon, in the form of a wide band in the ultra-violet region.

"I OBTAINED from Carnes a history of your case, and when I found that your attacks grew violent with the full moon and subsided with the new moon, I was sure that I was on the right track, although I had at that time no way of knowing whether it was from natural or artificial causes that the effect was being produced. I interviewed Admiral Clay and found that you were suffering from a form of dermititis resembling sunburn, and that convinced me that an attack was being made on your sanity, for an excess of ultra-violet light will always tend to produce sunburn. I inquired about the windows of your solarium, for ultra-violet light will not pass through a lead glass. When the Admiral told me that the glass had been replaced with fused quartz, which is quite permeable to ultra-violet and that the change had been almost coincident with the start of your malady, I asked him to get you out of the solarium and let me examine it.

"By means of certain fluorescent substances which I used, I found that your pillow was being bathed in a flood of ultra-violet light, and the fluoro-spectroscope soon told me that lunium emanations were present in large quantities. These rays were not coming to you directly from their source, but one of the windows of the State, War and Navy Building was being used as a reflector. I located the approximate source of the ray by means of an improvised apparatus, and we surrounded the place. Stokowsky was killed while attempting to escape. I guess that is about all there is to it."

"Thank you, Doctor," said the President. "I would be interested in a description of the apparatus which he used to produce this effect."

"THE apparatus was quite simple, Sir. It was merely a large collector of moonlight, which was thrown after collection onto a lunium plate. The resultant emanations were turned into a parallel beam by a parabolic reflector and focussed, through a rock crystal lens with an extremely long focal length, onto your pillow."

"Then Stokowsky had isolated Von Beyer's new element?" asked the President.

"I am still in doubt whether it is a new element or merely an allotropic modification of the common element, cadmium. The plate which he used has a very peculiar property. When moonlight, or any other reflected light of the same composition falls on it, it acts on the ray much as the button of a Roentgen tube acts on a cathode ray. As the cathode ray is absorbed and an entirely new ray, the X-ray, is given off by the button, just so is the reflected moonlight absorbed and a new ray of ultra-violet given off. This is the ray which Von Beyer detected. I thought that I could catch traces of Von Beyer's lines in my spectroscope, and I think now that it is due to a trace of lunium in the cadmium plating of the barrels. Von Beyer could have easily made the same mistake. Von Beyer's work, together with Sto-

kowsky's, opens up an entirely new field of spectroscopic research. I would give a good deal to go over to Baden and go into the matter with Von Beyer and make some plans for the exploitation of the new field, but I'm afraid that my pocketbook wouldn't stand the trip.

"I think that the United States owes you that trip, Dr. Bird," said the Chief Executive with a smile. "Make your plans to go as soon as you get your data together. I think that the Treasury will be able to take care of the expense without raising the income tax next year."

IN THE NEXT ISSUE

Murder Madness

Beginning an Intensely Gripping Four-Part Novel

By MURRAY LEINSTER

The Atom Smasher

A Thrilling Adventure into Time and Space

By VICTOR ROUSSEAU

Into the Ocean's Depths

A Sequel to "From the Ocean's Depths"

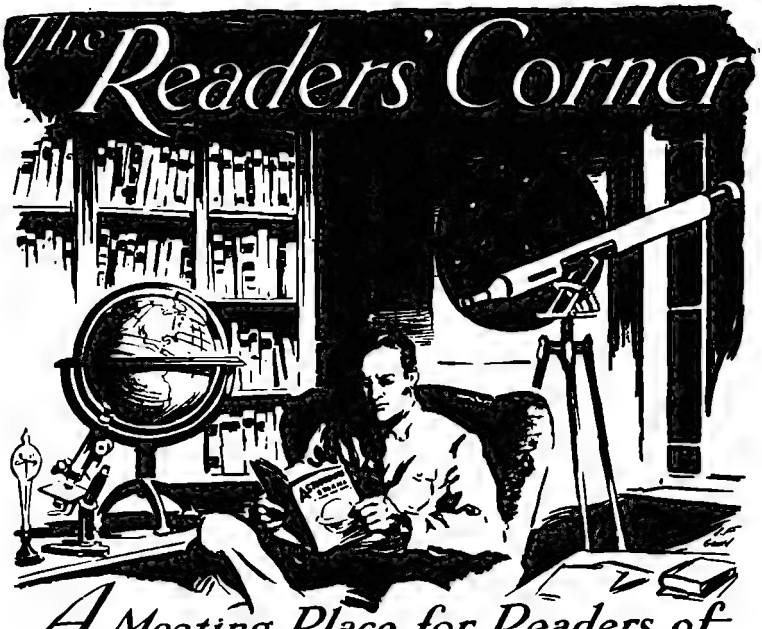
By SEWELL PEASLEE WRIGHT

Brigands of the Moon

Part Three of the Amazing Serial

By RAY CUMMINGS

——And Others!



A Meeting Place for Readers of Astounding Stories

Our Thanks

Three months ago the Clayton Magazines presented to lovers of Science Fiction everywhere a new magazine with a brand-new policy—Astounding Stories—and now it is the Editor's great pleasure to announce to our thousands of friends that this new magazine is enjoying a splendid success.

Within twenty-four hours of the time that Astounding Stories was released for sale, letters of praise began pouring into our offices, and—and this is significant—many of them clearly revealed that their writers had grasped the essential difference of the new Science Fiction magazine over the others.

We cannot better state this difference, this improvement, than by quoting what the Reader whose letter appears under the caption, "And Kind to Their Grandmothers," says in his very first paragraph: "And I was still more, pleased, and surprised, to find that the Editor seems to know that such stories should have real story interest, besides a scientific idea." It is exactly that. Every story that appears in Astounding Stories not only must contain some of the forecasted scientific achievements of To-morrow, but must be told vividly, excitingly, with all the human interest that goes to make any story enjoyable To-day.

The Editor and staff of Astounding Stories express their sincere thanks to all who have contributed to our splendid start—especially to those who had the kindness to write in with their helpful criticism.

Already one of your common suggestions has been taken up and embodied in our magazine, and so we

have this new department, "The Readers' Corner," which from now on will be an informal meeting place for all readers of Astounding Stories. We want you never to forget that a cordial and perpetual invitation is extended to you to write in and talk over with all of us anything of interest you may have to say in connection with our magazine.

If you can toss in a word of praise, that's fine; if only criticism, we'll welcome that just as much, for we may be able to find from it a way to improve our magazine. If you have your own private theory of how airplanes will be run in 2500, or if you think the real Fourth Dimension is different from what it is sometimes described—write in and share your views with all of us.

This department is all yours, and the job of running it and making it interesting is largely up to you. So "come over in 'The Readers' Corner'" and have your share in what everyone will be saying.

—*The Editor.*

"And Kind to Their Grandmothers!"

Dear Editor:

I received a pleasant surprise a few days ago when I found a new Science Fiction magazine at the newsstand—Astounding Stories. And I was still more pleased, and surprised, to find that the Editor seems to know that such stories should have real story interest, besides a scientific idea.

Of course I took with a grain of salt the invitation to write to the editor and give my preference of the kind of stories I like. I know that every editor, down in his heart, thinks his magazine is perfect "as is." In fact, praise is what they want, not suggestions, judging by the letters they print.

Well, I can conscientiously give you some praise. If Astounding Stories keep up to the standard of the first issue it will be all right. Evidently you can afford to hire the best writers obtainable. Notice you've signed up some of my favorites, Murray Leinster, R. F. Starzl, Ray Cummings. I like their stuff because it has the rare quality rather vaguely described as "distinction," which make the story remembered for a long time.

The story "Tanks," by Murray Leinster, is my idea of what such a story should be. The author does not start out, "Listen my children, and you shall hear a story so wonderful you won't believe it. Only after the death of Professor Bulging Dome do I dare to make it public to a doubting world." No, he simply proceeds to tell the story. If I were reading it in the Saturday Evening Post or Ladies Home Journal it would be all right to prepare me for the story by explaining that of course the author does not vouch for the story, it having been told to him by a crazy Eurasian in a Cottage Grove black-and-tan speakeasy at 3.30 A. M. In Astounding Stories I expect the story to be unusual, so don't bother telling me it is so. That criticism applies to "Phantoms of Reality," which is a story above the average, though, despite its rather flat title and slow beginning.

Here's another good point about "Tanks." Its characters are human. Some authors of stories of the future make their characters all brains—cold monsters, with no humanity in them. Such a story has neither human interest nor plausibility. The sky's the limit, I say, for mechanical or scientific accomplishments, but human emotions will be the same a thousand years from now. And even supposing that they will be changed, your readers have present day emotions. The magazine can not prosper unless those present-day emotions are aroused and mirrored by thoroughly human characters. The situation may be just as outre as you like—the more unusual the better—but it is the response of normal human emotions to most unusual situations that gives a magazine such as yours its powerful and unique "kick."

The response of the two infantrymen in "Tanks" to the strange and terrifying new warfare of the future exemplifies another point I would like to make—the fact that no matter what marvels the future may bring, the people who will live then will take them in a matter-of-fact way. Their conversation will be cigarettes, "sag-paste," drinks, women. References to the scientific marvels around them will be casual and sketchy. How many million words of an average car owner's conversation would you have to report to give a visitor from 1700 an idea of internal combustion engines? The author, if skilful, can convey that information in other ways. Yet a lot of stories printed have long, stilted conversations in which the author thinks he is conveying in an entertaining way his foundation situation. Personally, I like a lot of physical action—violent action preferred. This is so, probably, because I'm a school teacher and sedentary in my habits. I have never written a story in my life, but I'm the most voracious consumer of stories in Chicago. I like to see the hero get into a devil of a pickle, and to have him smash his way out. I like 'em big, tough, and kind to their grandmothers.

It seems to me that interplanetary stories offer the best vehicle for all the desirable qualities herein enumerated combined. There is absolutely no restraint on the imagination, except a few known astronomical facts—plenty of opportunity for violent and dangerous adventures, strange and terrestially impossible monsters. The human actors, set down in the midst of such terrifying conditions, which they battle dauntlessly, grinning as they take their blows and returning them with good will, cannot fail to rouse the admiration of the reader. And make him buy the next month's issue.

But spare us, please, the stories in which the hero, arriving on some other planet, is admitted to the court of the king of the White race, and leads their battles against the Reds, the Browns, the Greens, and so on, eventually marrying the king's daughter, who is always golden-haired, of milky white complexion, and has large blue eyes. Kindly reject stories of interplanetary travel in which a member of the party turns against the Earth party and allies himself with the wormlike Moon men, or what have you. Stories in which a great inventor gone crazy threatens to hurl the Earth into the Sun leave me cold and despondent, for the simple reason that crazy men are never great inventors. Name a great inventor who wasn't perfectly sane, if you can. The author makes the great inventor insane to make it plausible that he should want to destroy the World. Well, if he is a good author he can find some other motive.

One more thing. I like to smell, feel, hear and even taste the action of a story as well as see it. Some authors only let you see it, and then they don't tell you whether it's in bright or subdued light. The author of "Tanks" fulfills my requirements in this respect, at least partially.—Walter Boyle, c/o Mrs. Anna Treitz, 4751 North Artesian, Chicago, Ill.

A Permanent Reader

Dear Editor:

I want to thank you for the very entertaining hours I spent perusing your new magazine, Astounding Stories. I read one or two other Science Fiction magazines—it seems that tales of this sort intrigue me. However, I wish to say that the debut number of your magazine contained the best stories I ever read. Again thanking you and assuring you that should the stories continue thus I will be a permanent reader—Irving E. Ettinger, The Seville, Detroit, Mich.

We're Avoiding Reprints

Dear Editor:

I am well pleased with your new magazine and wish to offer you my congratulations and best wishes. As I am well acquainted with most of the Science Fiction now being written, I am in a good position to criticise your magazine.

First: The cover illustration is good, but the inside drawings could be greatly improved.

Second: Holding the magazine together with two staples is a good idea.

Third: The paper could be improved.

Fourth: The price is right.

Here I classify the stories. Excellent: "The Beetle Horde," and "Tanks." Very Good: "Cave of Horror," "Invisible Death," and "Phantoms of Reality." Medium: "Compensation." Poor: "Stolen Mind."

Please don't reprint any of Poe's, Wells', or Verne's works. My prejudice to Verne, Wells and Poe is that I have read all their works in other magazines.

However, with all my criticizing, I think that your magazine is a good one.—James Nichols, 1509 19th Street, Bakersfield, California.

Thanks, Mr. Marks!

Dear Editor:

I purchased a copy of "our" new magazine to-day and I think it excellent. I am glad to see most of my old author friends contributing for it, but how about looking up E. R. Burroughs, David H. Keller, M. D., C. P. Wantenbacker and A. Merritt? They are marvelous writers. I see Wesso did your cover, and it's very good. I have been a reader of four other Science Fiction monthly magazines and two quarterlies, but I gladly take this one into my fold and I think I speak for every other Science Fiction lover when I say this. Which means, if true, that "our publication will have everlasting success. Here's hoping!—R. O. Marks, Jr., 893 York Avenue, S. W., Atlanta, Ga.

A Fine Letter

Dear Editor:

Having read through the first number of Astounding Stories, my enthusiasm has reached such a pitch that I find it difficult to express myself adequately. A mere letter such as this can give scarcely an inkling of the unbounded enjoyment I derive from the pages of this unique magazine. To use a trite but appropriate phrase, "It fills a long-felt need." True, there are other magazines which specialize in Science Fiction; but, to my mind they are not in a class with Astounding Stories. In most of them the scientific element is so emphasized that it completely overshadows all else. In this magazine, happily, such is not the case. Here we find science subordinated to human interest, which is as it should be. The love element, too, is present, and by no means unwelcome.

As for the literary quality of the stories, it could not be improved on. Such craftsmen as Cummings, Leinster and Rousseau never fail to turn out a vivid, well-written tale. If the stories in the succeeding issues are on a par with those in the first, the success of the magazine is assured.

By the way, your editorial explanation of Astounding Stories was a gem. So many of us take our marvelous modern inventions for granted that we never consider how miraculous they would seem to our forebears. As you say, the only real difference between the Astounding and the Commonplace is Time. A magazine such as Astounding Stories enables us to anticipate the wonders of To-morrow. Through its pages we can peer into the vistas of the future and behold the world that is to be. Truly, you have given us a rare treat—Allen Glasser, 981 Forest Ave., New York, N. Y.

The Science Correspondence Club Broadcasts

Dear Editor:

The other day I came upon Astounding Stories on our local newsstand. I immedi-

ately procured a copy because Science Fiction is my favorite pastime, so to speak. I was very much overjoyed that another good Science Fiction magazine should come out, and a Clayton Magazine too, which enhances its splendid value still further. I have read various members of the Clayton family and I found each of them entertaining.

After finishing the first issue I decided to write in and express my feelings. The stories were all good with the exception of "The Stolen Mind." Just keep printing stories by Capt. Meek, Ray Cummings, Murray Leinster, C. V. Tench, Harl Vincent and R. F. Starlz and I can predict now that your new venture will be a huge success.

The main reason of this letter is to ask your help in putting over Science Fiction Week. This will take place in the early part of February, the week of the 9th or after. We want your cooperation in making this a big success. You can help by running the attached article upon the Science Correspondence Club in your "Readers' Corner." It will be a big aid.

I am sure, because you are the Editor of Astounding Stories, that you will be pleased to help us in this venture. Science Fiction is our common meeting ground and our common ideal.

I hope to have a Big Science Fiction Week with your help.—Conrad H. Ruppert, 113 North Superior Street, Angola, Indiana.

To the Readers of Astounding Stories:

At the present there exists in the United States an organization the purpose of which is to spread the gospel of Science and Science Fiction, and Science Correspondence Club. I am writing this to induce the readers of Astounding Stories to join us. After reading this pick up your pen or take the cover from your typewriter and send in an application for membership to our Secretary, Raymond A. Palmer, 1431—38th St., Milwaukee, Wisconsin, or to our President, Aubrey Clements, 6 South Hilliard St., Montgomery, Alabama. They will forward application blanks to you and you will belong to the only organization in the world that is like it.

The Club was formed by twenty young men from all over the U. S. We have a roll of almost 100, all over the world. Its expressed purpose has been to help the cause of Science Fiction, and to increase the knowledge of Science. It also affords the advantage of being able to express your ideas in all fields.

The Preamble of the Constitution which we have worked out reads: "We, the members of this organization, in order to promote the advancement of Science in general among laymen of the world through the use of discussion and the creation and exchange of new ideas, do ordain and establish this organization for the Science Correspondence Club."

Article Two reads: "The institution will remain an organization to establish better coordination between the scientifically inclined laymen of the world, regardless of sex, creed, color, or race. There will be no restriction as to age, providing the member can pass an examination which shall be prepared by the membership committee."

The Club will also publish a monthly bulletin, to which members may contribute. It will also publish clippings, articles, etc., dealing with science.

The membership will have no definite limit, and the correspondence will be governed by the wishes of each member.

Need more be said?

I almost forgot to say that we have two of the best Science Fiction authors as active members, and three more who are doing their best, but because of much work they cannot be active.

I hope my appeal bears fruit and that we shall hear from you soon.—Conrad H. Ruppert.

But—Most Everybody Prefers the Smaller Size—and Price!

Dear Editor:

Last night I was passing a newsstand and saw your magazine. I bought it then and there. I do not read any other stories except the fantastic stories. Astounding Stories looks all right, but may I make a suggestion? Why not increase the size of the magazine to that of Miss 1930 or Forest and Stream? It would certainly look better! You could also raise your price to twenty-five cents. Please print as many stories as possible by the following authors: Ray Cummings, Edgar Rice Burroughs, Murray Leinster, Edmond Hamilton, A. Hyatt Verrill, Stanton A. Coblents, Ed. Earl Repp and Harl Vincent.

My favorite type of story is the interplanetary one. I wish you the best of luck in your new venture.—Stephen Takacs, 303 Eckford Street, Brooklyn, N. Y.

"First Copy Wonderful"

Dear Editor:

I have read the first copy of Astounding Stories and think it wonderful. I am very much interested in science fiction. I prefer interplanetary stories and would like to see many of them in the new magazine. Your authors are fine. The ones I like particularly are Ray Cummings, Captain S. P. Meek, and Murray Leinster. I wonder if I could subscribe to Astounding Stories? Will you let me know? Good luck to the new magazine.—Donald Sisler, 3111 Adams Mill Road, Washington, D. C.

Congratulations

Dear Editor:

Allow me to congratulate you upon the starting of your new magazine, Astounding Stories. Have just finished reading the first issue and it is fine. While the class of stories that you publish do not appeal to all, I feel quite sure that there are many like myself who will welcome your publication and wish it all success.—R. E. Norton, P. O. Box 226, Ashtabula, Ohio.

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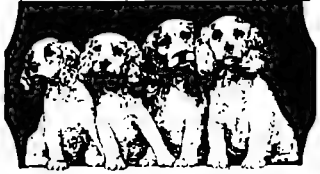

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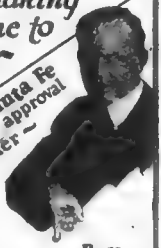

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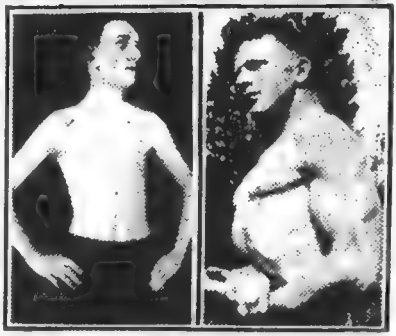

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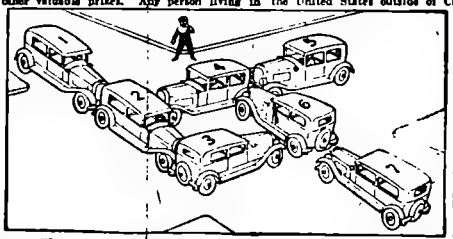

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Over 500,000 men and women used Superba Remedy to help stop Cigarettes, Cigars, Pipe, Chewing or Snuff. Write for full treatment on trial. Contains no dope or habit forming drugs. Costs $2.00 if successful, nothing if not. SUPERBA CO., A-11, Baltimore, Md.

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Every year I am showing hundreds how to make more money in Radio than they were making in other lines. It is where you find big growth that you find many big opportunities. Fine jobs in Broadcasting Stations, with Manufacturers, Dealers, Shipping Companies, Talking Movies and other lines are opening continually.

Many $50, $60, $75, and $100 a Week Jobs Opening Every Year in Radio

Here's proof that my training is raising salaries. J. A. Vaughn, 3715 S. Kingshighway, St. Louis, Mo., jumped from $35 to $100 a week. E. E. Winborne, 1414 W. 48th St., Norfolk, Va., seldom makes under $100 a week now. Eric L. Chambers, 228 W. 7th St., Cincinnati, Ohio, made well over $5,000 last year. Read their letters in my book—see what my training is doing.

Money Back If You Are Not Satisfied

Hold your job until you are ready for another. I'll train you at home in your spare time; give you over 50 Lesson Texts, over 40 Service Sheets, with authentic information on servicing different makes of sets. 8 Outfits of Radio parts for a home experimental laboratory, and much other material and service. Take my course, after you finish if you are not satisfied with my Lessons and Instruction Service, tell me and I will refund your tuition.

Act Now. Find Out what Radio Offers You.

Get my 64-page book "Rich Rewards in Radio." Mail the coupon below. It points out where the good Radio jobs are, what they pay. It gives over 100 letters from students and graduates. Many tell you their salaries have been doubled and tripled and others tell how they made $200 to $1,000 in their spare time while learning. After you've read it you can decide one way or the other.

J. E. SMITH, President,
National Radio Institute, Dept. ODM
Washington, D. C.

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National Radio Institute, Dept. ODM,
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Dear Mr. Smith: Send me your book, "Rich Rewards in Radio," which gives the facts on Radio's opportunities and your practical Radio training. This request does not obligate me and I understand no agent will call.

Name _____ Age _____

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"Up to the time I enrolled for a course with the International Correspondence Schools, I had only a grade-school education. Since enrolling, I have advanced to a much better position, where my salary is nearly four times as much as I was making previously. I would not be able to hold my present position had I not taken your Course. Recently I received a nice increase in salary, while other men were being reduced."

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Why don't you study and get ready too? We'll be glad to help you if you will only make the start.

Choose the work you like best in the coupon below; then mark and mail it to the I. C. S. today. This doesn't obligate you in the least, but it will bring you information that will start you on a successful career. This is your opportunity.

Mail the Coupon for Free Booklet

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Box 2127-E, Scranton, Penna.

Without cost or obligation, please send me a copy of your booklet, "Who Wins and Why," and full particulars about the course *before* which I have marked X in the list below:

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- ☐ Architectural Draftsman
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- ☐ Concrete Builder
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- ☐ Electrical Engineer
- ☐ Electrical Contractor
- ☐ Electric Wiring
- ☐ Electric Lighting
- ☐ Reading Shop Blueprints
- ☐ Telegraph Engineer
- ☐ Telephone Work
- ☐ Mechanical Engineer
- ☐ Mechanical Draftsman
- ☐ Machine Shop Practice
- ☐ Toolmaker
- ☐ Patternmaker
- ☐ Civil Engineer
- ☐ Surveying and Mapping
- ☐ Bridge Engineer
- ☐ Gas Engine Operating
- ☐ Automobile Mechanic
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- ☐ Steam Engineer
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- ☐ Refrigeration Engineer
- ☐ R. R. Positions
- ☐ Highway Engineer
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- ☐ Coal Mining Engineer
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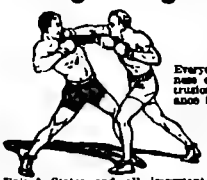
If you reside in Canada, send this coupon to the International Correspondence Schools Canadian, Limited, Montreal, Canada

A Fight Against Rupture



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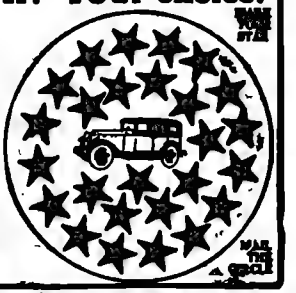

Pick Your Lucky Star!

All the stars in the circle are exactly alike except one. That star is different to all the others and it may be a lucky star for you. Can you pick it out? If you can, mark the different star and send the circle to me at once along with your name and address. A prompt answer can start you on the way to win the great $2000.00 free prize.

BE PROMPT—WIN $650.00 EXTRA

Someone like you who will write me at once can get $650.00 cash just for being prompt, so you may thank your lucky stars if you send your answer right off. No risk. Nothing to buy. Nothing hard to do. Over $7000.00 in valuable prizes will be given free of cost. Send today and I will show you just how you can get your free choice of these splendid new sedans or $2000.00 cash, without cost or obligation of any kind. All win plan! A reward for everybody! SEND NO MONEY. Answer AT ONCE.

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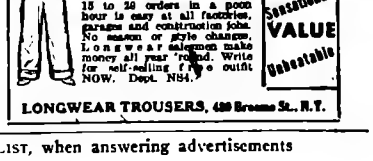
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15 to 20 orders in a room hour is easy at all factories, garages and construction jobs. No season or style changes. Longwear salesmen make money all year 'round. Write for self-selling free outfit NOW. Dept. N84.
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Win $3,500.00

Prizes from $1800.00 to $4245.00 each have been won through our unique advertising plan. In our last, an old man of 69, out of work, won over $5000.00. A boy, only 15, won $900.00. In next 3 or 4 months thousands of dollars will be awarded to fortunate persons who solve our puzzles and win our prizes.

FIND THE TWIN FLYERS

Watch out! These twelve pictures of a famous woman flyer all look alike—BUT—two, and only two, are exactly alike. Find these twin flyers! Some pictures are different in the collar, helmet, goggles or tie. Remember, only two of the twelve are exactly alike. Find them, and send the numbers of the twin flyers on a post card or letter today. If correct, your answer will qualify you for this opportunity.

$7500.00 IN PRIZES GIVEN THIS TIME

Over 25 prizes, and duplicate prizes in case of ties. It's up to the winner whether he or she chooses $2875.00 in cash or a new Waco airplane, a big automobile, or a new home. A gorgeous prize list! ANYONE WHO ANSWERS THIS PUZZLE CORRECTLY MAY RECEIVE PRIZES OR CASH.

$625.00 ADDITIONAL FOR PROMPTNESS

Be prompt! It pays. Find the two twin flyers, and I will send Certificate which will be good for $625.00 if you are prompt and win first prize. Imagine, a first prize of $3500.00!

NO MORE PUZZLES TO SOLVE. Any man, woman, boy, or girl in the U. S. A., anyone at all, except residents of Chicago, Illinois, and former major prize winners of 25 of the people who take up this offer are going to win these wonderful prizes. Be one of them. Send the numbers of the twin flyers. Send no money, but be prompt.

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FREE sample outfit with special offer. Write quickly for offer, plan and territory.

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One device makes window washing 75% easier. Washes, dries, polishes 4 at once in a jiffy. Women wild about it! No more ladders to climb, no messy rags nor sponges to wring. Hands never touch water.

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Every housewife wants it. Fascinating demonstrator. Sells fast. Make 100% profit. No experience needed. We show you how. Send for big catalog of this and 47 other fast-selling quality Rubber Products Direct from Akron, the Rubber City.

FREE Outfit to hustlers. WRITE QUICK.

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ONLY 25c

Get an arm of might with the power and grip to obey your physical desires. Within 30 days you can now build your arm from a scrawny piece of skin and bone to one of huge muscular size. I don't mean just a 17-inch bicep but a 15-inch forearm and an 8-inch wrist. This specially prepared course will build every muscle in the arm because it has been scientifically worked out for that purpose. You can develop a pair of triceps shaped like a horseshoe and just as strong, and a pair of biceps that will show their double head formation. The sinewy cables between the biceps and elbow will be deep and thick with wire cable ligaments. In that arm of yours, the forearm will belly with bulk, and the great supinator lifting muscle you can make into a column of power, while your wrist will grow alive and writhe with cordy sinew. All this you can get for 25 cents—send for this course today and within 30 days' time you can have a he-man's arm built to be as beautiful, brawny and magnificent as the village blacksmith's.

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Dear Mr. Jowett: I am enclosing 25c. Please send me the course "MOULDING A MIGHTY ARM" and a free copy of "THE THRILL OF BEING STRONG."

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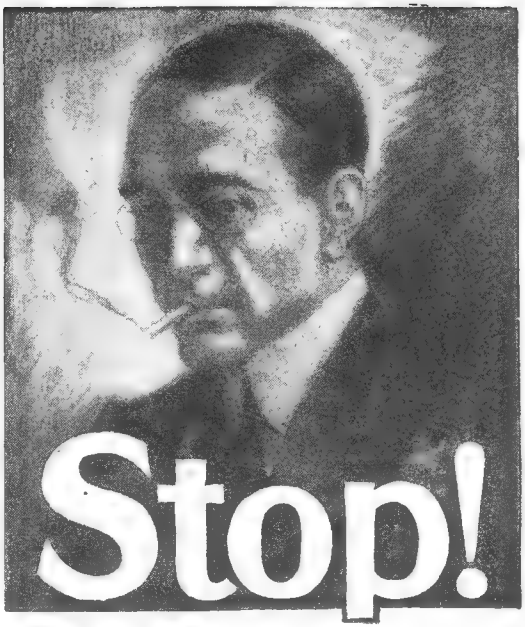

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Perhaps you've tried to stop using tobacco only to find that the habit has such a hold on you that you gave up trying.

You know, better than anyone else, whether tobacco is hurting you, and if it is, that sooner or later, it will undermine your health. Heart trouble, indigestion, dyspepsia, nervousness, insomnia, poor eyesight—these and many other disorders can often be traced directly to the use of tobacco, according to good medical authority. Besides it is an **expensive, utterly useless** habit.

Let Us Help You To Banish The Habit

No matter how firm a grip tobacco has on you—no matter whether you've been smoking cigars, pipe or cigarettes or chewing plug or fine cut for a month or 50 years—**Tobacco Redeemer** will in most cases remove all craving for tobacco in any form in a very few days. It does its work so quickly that all tobacco "hunger" is gone almost before you know it. The desire for a smoke or chew usually begins to decrease after the very first dose.

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Get our free booklet. It tells you all about the deadly effects of tobacco and how easy it is now to quit. We will also send you copies of letters from confirmed users telling how this simple, home-treatment freed them absolutely from the habit. Just mail coupon—or a postal will do.

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The 16 cars in circle all look alike. 15 of them are exactly alike—but one is different from the rest. Find this "different" car if you can—and mark it. The difference may be in fenders, bumper, name plate, radiator or top. Careful—don't let this puzzle stump you, because winner must solve puzzle correctly first in order to
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Winner has choice of Buick Sedan or cash if preferred. No more puzzles to solve. Duplicate prizes in case of ties. All actively interested who have answered correctly will receive prizes or cash compensations. Nothing to buy, now, later or ever, so send no money.
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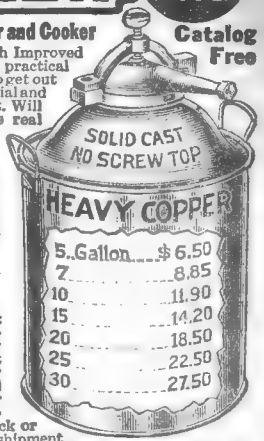

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Prostate trouble is now reached immediately by a new kind of home treatment—a new safe hygiene that goes directly to the gland itself, without drugs, medicine, massage, lessons, diet or the application of electricity. It is absolutely safe. 50,000 men have used it to restore the prostate gland to normal functioning. The principle involved in this treatment is recommended by practically all the physicians in America. Amazing recoveries are often made in six days. Another grateful effect is usually the immediate disappearance of chronic constipation. Usually the entire body is toned up. These results are guaranteed. Either you feel ten years younger in six days or the treatment costs nothing.

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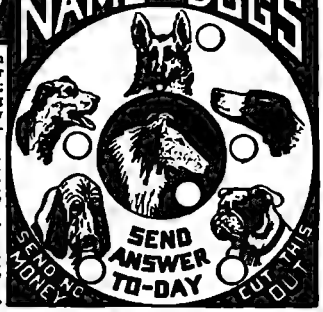
WIN $2000.00 NAME THE DOGS



Big friendship offer. $3000 in prizes given away. Someone will win $1000 cash and Nash Sedan, or $2000 cash! Why not you? Over $15,000 already given. Mrs. Harrell won $500; N. LaValle, won $700; R. A. Dobbins won $2500; many others won fine prizes. Nothing to buy. Only 3 things to do—name the dogs, advertise us to a few people right around your home, and then play in a jolly and fascinating fun game that you will enjoy. 50 fine cash prizes.

NAME THE DOGS Six dogs are pictured here. 1. Collie, 2. Police dog, 3. Airedale, 4. Bull, 5. Setter, 6. Bloodhound. Can you name them? Mark the Collie as No. 1, Police dog No. 2, etc. Number all 6 dogs. Send your answer at once. A close observer who names the dogs correctly is going to win. First prize $1000 cash and Nash Sedan Extra for being on time; or $3000 all cash.

Send Answer Today Name the dogs and you start to win! $3000 in prizes. Cash allowance guaranteed to every one who takes active part. No risk. Costs a 2c stamp to mail your answer. Costs nothing to win! If you want to win send answer today for complete particulars. Everything sent free and postpaid and you will not be obligated in any way. Name the Game! SEND NO MONEY. Hurry! Promptness pays!

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Look Yourself Over!

How do you shape up? Are you giving yourself a square deal? Have you got those big, rolling muscles that mean health and strength inside and out? The vitality that gives you the ambition to win out at everything you start? Make that girl admire you first and foremost for a real He-Man and the hardest part in winning her is over.

I Can Give It To You in 30 Days

In 30 days I can do you over so that she will hardly know you. I'll put a whole inch of solid muscle on each arm in 30 days, and two whole inches of rippling strength across your chest. I've done it for over a hundred thousand others, and I can do it for you. I don't care how weak and puny you are. I like to get them weak and puny, because it's the hopeless cases that I work with best. It gives me a lot of real joy just to see them develop and the surprised look in their eyes when they step before the mirror at the end of 30 days and see what a miracle I have worked for them.

You'll Be a He-Man From Now On!

And it's no temporary layer of muscle I put on you. It's there to stay! With those newly broadened shoulders; that perfect neck and great, manly chest, you can maintain your self-respect in any society. Every woman will know that you are what every man should be—a forceful, red-blooded He-Man.

I Want You For 90 Days

If at the end of 30 days you think you have improved, wait till you see yourself at the end of 90 days. Then the friends you thought were strong will seem like children by comparison. I'm not called the Muscle Builder for nothing. My system scientifically builds real muscle faster than you ever imagined.

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Watch Them Turn Around

Notice how every woman prefers the fellow who carries himself with head up. Notice how the broad-shouldered man always gets their eye. They want a dependable He-Man when they make their choice—one who can protect them. And you can be that man. Remember, I not only promise it, I GUARANTEE IT.

Now don't put it off a minute. Get going to new happiness and real manhood to-day.

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